# 1. INTRODUCTION

The process of the testing, examination, assessment and evaluation of the students' learning progress has to start and end with the teacher's appraisal of his or her own performance. This manual, simply titled "Evaluation", covers the entire process.

> **The self-appraisal of teachers comes first for good reason:**
> …without a critical assessment of your own performance, you will rarely if ever be in a position to assess and evaluate your students' learning progress accurately and fairly.
>
> **2** **Fundamental questions are at the root of the evaluation process:**
>
> **1. How well are the students learning?**
> **2. How effectively is the teacher teaching?**

These two questions imply that teachers have to respond to the concerns about better learning and effective teaching.
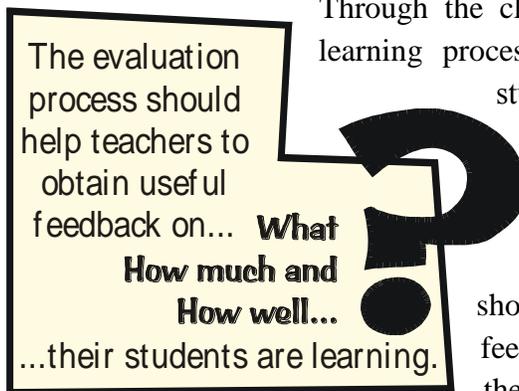


While conservative teachers may still insist that learning is only a matter of student discipline, i.e. students submitting to the teacher's authority and learning to recall book knowledge, it has been recognized by progressive teachers that good learning starts and ends with good teaching. Students becoming effective, self-directed learners is the paramount goal of good teaching.

The countries where students are encouraged to learn according to their needs and not according to the teachers' demands are the countries where students do apply what they have learned most effectively. It places emphasis on the following two requirements: teachers have to become systematic observers who are sensitive to the learning process as it takes place in their classrooms, and, at the same time they should become more self-critical of their teaching. Classrooms can be viewed as laboratories for the study of a mutual teaching/learning process. This view will help to develop an understanding of learning and the impact of teaching upon it.
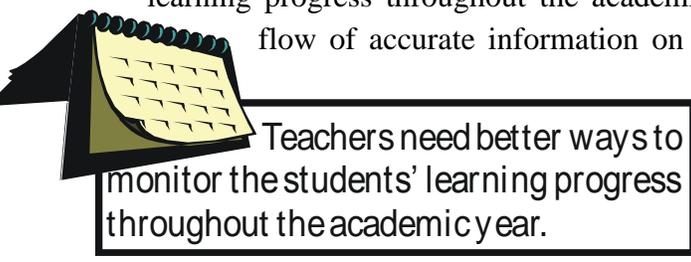
The evaluation process presented in this manual should involve the students and the teacher in the continuous monitoring of the students' learning. It will provide feedback about the teacher's effectiveness and give students a measure of their progress as learners. But most important, if the evaluation process is created, administered, and analyzed by the teacher himself or herself on questions of teaching and learning, the likelihood that the teacher will apply the results of this process to his or her own teaching is greatly enhanced.

The evaluation process should help teachers to obtain useful feedback on... **What How much and How well...** ...their students are learning.

Through the close observation of the students in the learning process, and the frequent feedback on the students' learning progress, teachers can learn much about how their students learn and, more specifically, how their students respond to particular teaching techniques. Thus the evaluation process should help teachers to obtain useful feedback on what, how much, and how well their students are learning. This information can then be used to refocus the teaching and experiment with new or adapted teaching techniques, which will help the students make their learning yet more efficient and more effective.
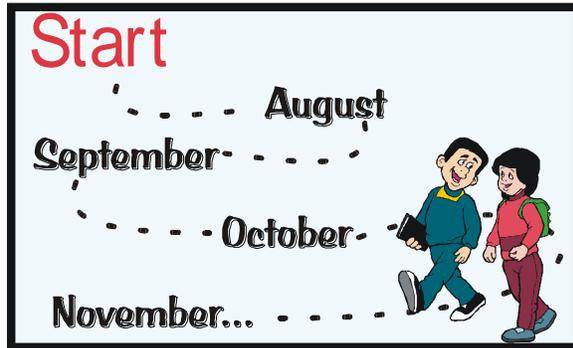
Teachers who simply assume that their students are learning what they are taught are regularly faced with disappointing evidence to the contrary when they grade homework, tests, exams and learning statements. Too often, students do not learn as much or as well as is expected. Considerable gaps may occur between what was taught and what has been learned. By the time a teacher notices these gaps in knowledge or understanding, it may well be too late to remedy the situation.

To avoid such unhappy surprises, teachers need better ways to monitor the students' learning progress throughout the academic year. They need a continuous flow of accurate information on student learning. First of all the teacher needs to know whether all students are really starting off on the same foot and, if not, needs to remedy this situation.

Teachers need better ways to monitor the students' learning progress throughout the academic year.
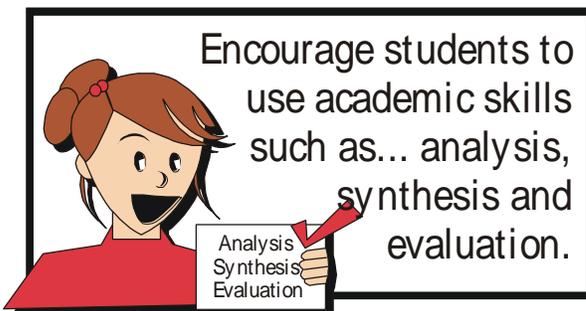
As the course proceeds, the teacher needs to check whether the students are achieving the objectives of all intermediate points. Consequently, it is not enough to test students when the syllabus has arrived at a particular point to ensure high-quality learning. The evaluation of the students' learning progress is an ongoing process throughout the academic year to monitor how well students started into the year and what they have learned at all intermediate points. This will provide the required information for improvement when learning is not quite satisfactory.

Through practice, teachers can come to understand their students' learning needs and promote self-directed learning. This will increase the teachers' ability to help the students become more effective learners. Simply put, the central purpose of the evaluation process is to empower both the teachers and their students to improve the quality of learning in the classroom.

## 1. 1  Before You Begin Evaluation…

As mentioned above, first of all, the teacher needs to know whether all students are really starting off. Suggestions are offered on how you as a teacher can identify the level of each student's knowledge, how you can make decisions about placing them in the instructional program, and how you can assess the students' progress in acquiring English.

Instruction in ESL/EFL should be cognitively complex, that is, it should be a form of instruction that encourages students to use academic skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. This form of instruction must be linked to equally complex forms of assessment, so that the students' progress in language acquisition and their ability of applying the acquired language may be evaluated fairly and accurately.
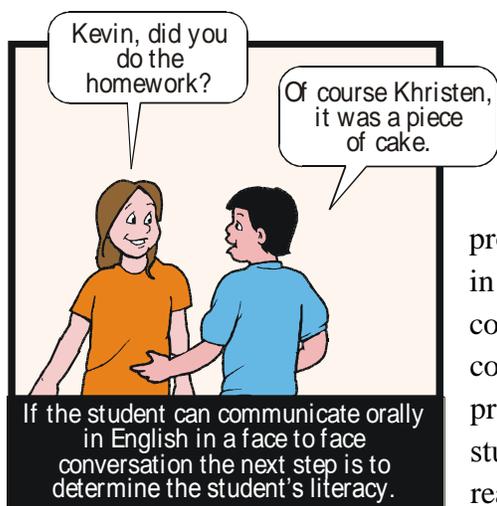
Because an ESL/EFL student does speak a language other than English at home, the next concerns revolve around the student's language proficiency a) in his or her native language and b) in English, as well as c) the student's knowledge of academic content or life experience gained.

## a) Native language proficiency: oral communication and literacy

Establishing the student's native language oral proficiency and his or her literacy is crucially important for the student's appropriate placing and a successful outcome of any form of ESL/EFL instructions. This process serves to place those students who lack knowledge of the intricacies and of the various forms of the proper application of their native language separately from those students who have that knowledge.

ESTABLISH...

The students' native language oral proficiency and literacy.

It has been proven that students who lack skill and knowledge of the application of their native language don't appreciate the work and learning commitment that is required of them to learn and apply a foreign language formally. They may, with special instructions, acquire a limited level of social and conversational English. But it is not advisable to consider them for participation in an English class that will eventually lead to the acquisition and application of academic English. Only after the minimum required level of native language proficiency and knowledge of its grammatical structures has been acquired by the student, should he or she be considered for an English language proficiency examination and, if successful, for his or her participation in grade-level ESL/EFL classroom instructions.

Kevin, did you do the homework?

Of course Khristen, it was a piece of cake.

If the student can communicate orally in English in a face to face conversation the next step is to determine the student's literacy.
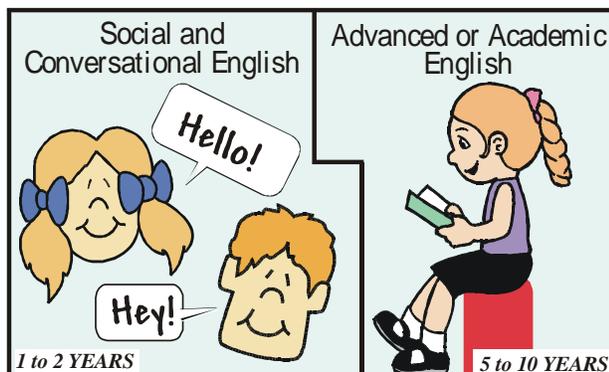
## b) English language proficiency: oral communication and literacy

A typical sequence for assessing English language proficiency begins with the student's proficiency in understanding spoken English and in responding to English. If the student can communicate orally in English in a face-to-face conversation or in an examination of oral proficiency, the next step is to determine the student's literacy, that is, the student's facility in reading and writing English.
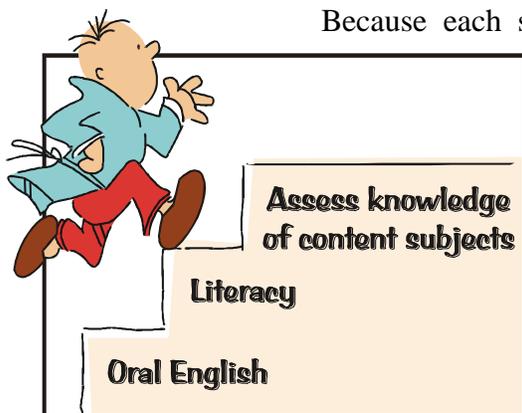
It is important to remember that a student who can understand and respond orally in English in a face-to-face conversation may not be proficient enough in written English to be placed in a formal English language classroom.

Within one to two years, students can acquire social and conversational English. However, it may take a student from five to ten years of regular school instruction to acquire literacy in advanced or academic English, so that the student can understand textbook presentations of content material in language arts.



## c) English proficiency: academic content or life experience gained

After evaluating the student's knowledge of oral English and literacy, the next step is to assess knowledge of content subjects in English. This subject knowledge may be of a purely academic nature or, in the case of adult students, related to life experience.



Because each subject has its own specialized vocabulary, a student who understands basic oral English may still need extra support in learning content subjects in English, especially for the advanced levels.

If the student studied in a bilingual program or acquired basic English in a bilingual environment, you may need to assess content knowledge in the student's native language.
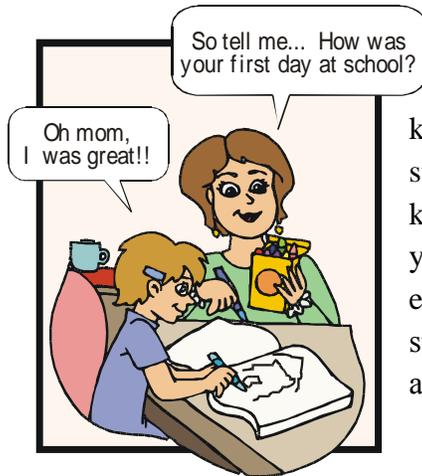
**When the student comes to school on the first day, you might ask the following questions about the student's background:**

**1** What subjects did you study in school? In which language(s) did you study?

**2** Which books did you use in school? In which language(s) were those books written?

**3**

Did you study in a bilingual program? If you did, which subjects did you study in your native language, and which subjects did you study in English?

**4** (For students with work experience:) Did you use English in your work environment? Was the work environment bilingual? Did you use English at work in a technical / professional or in a social / conversational context?

As a result of following the above procedure, you may have identified the level of each student's knowledge, and you will know if all your students start off on more or less the same level. This knowledge is crucial for the successful application of your teaching techniques and learning strategies, and even more so the successful achievement of each student's individual learning objective as well as achieving the curriculum's objective.

## 2.  APPRAISAL

| | |
|---|---|
| **Main Entry:** | ap·prais·al |
| **Pronunciation:** | [à'práyz'l] |
| **Function:** | noun |
| **Inflected Form(s):** | plural: ap·prais·als |
| **Etymology:** | Latin *apprehendere* |
| **First English use:** | 15th century, alteration of *apprise*, on the model of *praise* via French "*apprendre*" (*learn, teach*) from Latin *apprehendere* "*apprehend, capture*". |

**1. The action or the instance of assessing**
**2. A formal assessment of a work performance**

The appraisal process in the classroom is a reflective process of the teacher upon his or her own work. Therefore, in the context of this manual, the focus in regard to appraisal will be on the teacher's self-appraisal.

### 2.1  The Teacher's Self-Appraisal

*Teachers have the responsibility to review their own effectiveness and to seek improvements as part of a continuing process of their professional development.*

First, teacher's work might be conceived of as labor, whereby the teacher's task is to implement educational programs as required along with adherence to prescribed procedures and routines.

Second, teaching might be seen as a craft, that is, an activity involving knowledge of specialized techniques and rules for applying them.

Third, the work of the teacher might be viewed as that of a profession. In this view, a teacher would need to be able to muster not only theoretical and technical knowledge and specialized skills and techniques but also sound professional judgement about their application arising from a body of knowledge of theory.

Fourth, teacher's work might be considered an art, and the artistry manifested in unpredictable, novel, and unconventional applications of techniques in personalized rather than standardized forms.

For a global assessment of your work and how you wish to consider it, you need to analyze the needs of your students, assess the resources available to you, take the curriculum's objectives into account, and decide on your instructional techniques. Self-appraisal of your teaching, on the other hand, is conducted largely to ensure that you employ the proper standards of practice in response to your students' needs and learning objectives.
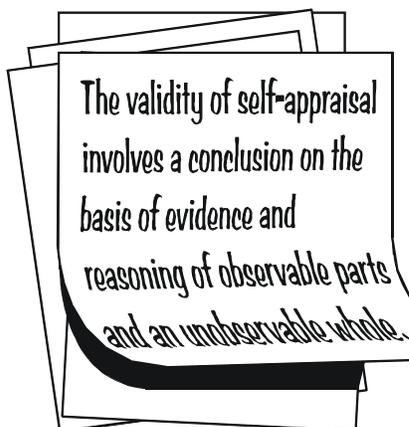
## 2.2  The Three Dimensions of You as a Teacher

**Important conceptual distinctions of your self-appraisal concern three aspects or dimensions of your quality as a teacher. Distinguish between:**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Your competence** | i.e. the extent to which you possess the knowledge and skills defined as necessary qualifications to teach. |
| **Your performance** | i.e. the way in which you behave in the process of teaching. |
| **Your effectiveness** | i.e. the degree to which you achieve the desired learning effects upon your students. |

These dimensions are important because they influence the type of evidence that you gather in order for you to judge the results of your self-appraisal. Assessing your competence is a test of your knowledge. Assessing your performance is a reflection of your students' responses and participation. Assessing your effectiveness involves reviewing data about your influence on the progress of your students toward a defined educational goal, an objective, and it involves most likely the assessment of your students' homework, tests, exams and learning statements as well as their overall classroom performance.
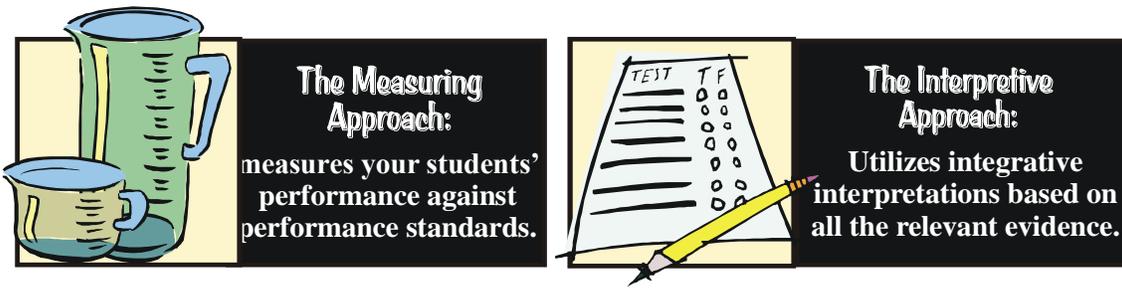
## 2.3  The Validity of Your Self-Appraisal

The validity of self-appraisal involves a conclusion on the basis of evidence and reasoning of observable parts and an unobservable whole.
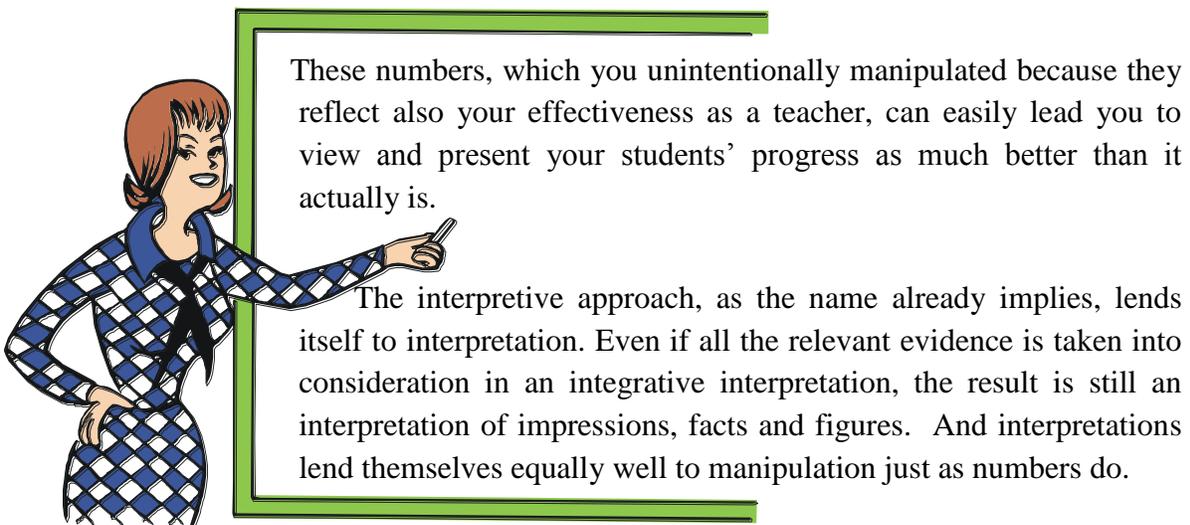
How do you establish the validity of your self-appraisal? It involves a conclusion on the basis of evidence and reasoning of observable parts and an unobservable whole that is implicit in the purpose and intent of the self-appraisal. It means that although numeric values of students' test or exam results form a basis for your self-appraisal, it is the students' achievement of their individual learning objectives that is equally if not more important in establishing the validity of your self-appraisal.

## 2.4  Should You Measure or Interpret Your Students' Performance?

The question remains whether the validity of your self-appraisal can best be established by measuring your students' performance against performance standards (the measuring approach) or by utilizing integrative interpretations based on all the relevant evidence (the interpretive approach).

**The Measuring Approach:**
measures your students' performance against performance standards.

**The Interpretive Approach:**
Utilizes integrative interpretations based on all the relevant evidence.
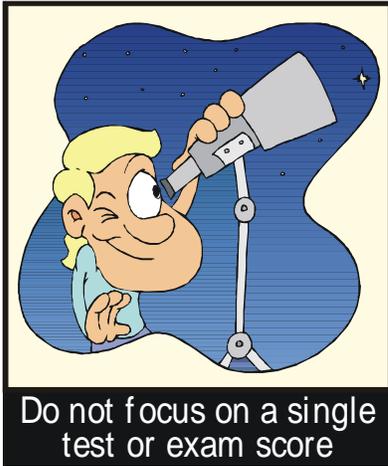
When applying the measuring approach, remember that numbers can be manipulated in the same proportion, as they in turn become manipulative. It means that the evaluation, i.e. the values of the results of your students' tests and exams expressed in numbers do not necessarily reflect the true extent of the students' learning progress, although the students' performance may have been measured against a performance standard.

These numbers, which you unintentionally manipulated because they reflect also your effectiveness as a teacher, can easily lead you to view and present your students' progress as much better than it actually is.

The interpretive approach, as the name already implies, lends itself to interpretation. Even if all the relevant evidence is taken into consideration in an integrative interpretation, the result is still an interpretation of impressions, facts and figures.  And interpretations lend themselves equally well to manipulation just as numbers do.

**Therefore**- in the attempt to establish the validity of your self-appraisal neither the measuring nor the interpretive approach applied exclusively will do. Therefore, resist the temptation!

## 2.5  Systematic Appraisal



Do not focus on a single test or exam score

Instead of applying the measuring approach <u>or</u> the interpretive approach, you should implement a systematic appraisal of the results of your educational practices that includes elements of both types of approaches.  Rather than focusing on single test or exam scores or the pure interpretation of performance, your self-appraisal should be a reflection of your classroom observations that are based upon form and content of each aspect of the students' learning process. This will permit you to envision and implement the goals of higher achievement and class improvement.

1. Self-appraisal should be reflective of the knowledge and skills you are expected to master as a minimum requirement for responsible practice. In the process of self-appraisal, you should be able to assess teaching and learning circumstances and make decisions in light of your knowledge about teaching and learning, about the students you serve, and about your moral obligations.

2. Self-appraisal should be constructed so as to be reflective of your professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions. That is, the self-appraisal should be designed and staged in such a way that it increases the probability of you improving your capabilities.

3. Self-appraisal should be reliable and valid in as far as proving to yourself that you are adequately prepared for responsible independent practice or that you are not. In the latter case, your self-appraisal should provide evidence in which areas and to what extent you need to improve to become adequately prepared for responsible independent practice.



Reflecting on your classroom observations that are based upon form and content of each aspect of the students' learning process will permit you to envision and implement the goals of higher achievement and class improvement.

A systematic evaluation of the results of your educational practices can be achieved by assessing your students' classroom performance on a continuous basis while you are teaching. This is neither a time-consuming nor a distracting process, as may be assumed, if you use a class list in the form of a worksheet with columns for your students' names, attendance, participation, homework, subject matter knowledge, proficiency, and/or any other assessment criterion you wish to enter.

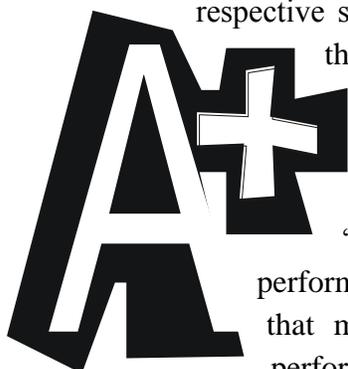| Name | A | P | H | P | F |
|------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Juan | A | B | A | A | B |
| Luis | B | B | C | B | B |
| Laura | A | B | A | A | B |
| Paulo | A | A | A | A | A |
| Clara | A | B | A | A | B |

**Systematic Evaluation**

Per student, the worksheet should provide two lines for you to enter symbols or work values concerning form and content, respectively, in regard to the assessment criteria you defined. Form, in an ESL/EFL class for instance, would refer to the correct usage of the language.

Content, on the other hand, would refer to the student's correct recognition of and response to the specific subject matter at hand almost regardless of the correct form of the response.

FORM: ✓
Refers to the correct usage of the language.

CONTENT:
Refers to the students' correct recognition of and response to the specific subject matter at hand (almost regardless of the correct form of the response).

Thus prepared it is then, for you only, a matter of using the class list/worksheet to enter the symbols or work-values in the appropriate columns that are reflective of the respective student's answers, statements or performance. At the end of the lesson you may assess at a glance how well the students as a group performed.

Although the symbols, e.g. '+' or '-', or work values, e.g. 'A', 'B', 'C', etc, refer to the individual student's performance, when seen as a whole, they reflect the success or, for that matter, failure of the class and thus by implication your performance as a teacher. A clearer picture of your performance as

a teacher will yet emerge when you enter actual performance values in each column for each student based on your symbols or work values, and you summarize the values of a number of lessons, e.g. those of a module.

**Thereby you achieve two things at once, namely:**

**Feedback**

| Juan | A | B | A |
|------|---|---|---|
| Luis | B | B | C |
| Laura | A | B | A |
| Paulo | A | A | A |
| Clara | A | B | A |

A feedback on a student by student basis of how well they responded individually to your teaching techniques over an extended period of time.

**Analysis**

Listening
Speaking
Group Work
Individual Work
Pronunciation
Participation

A backwash of information that will permit you to perform an analysis of the class as a whole that results in a comprehensive, reliable and valid self-appraisal.

## 3.  TEST / EXAMINATION

### TEST

| | |
|---|---|
| **Main Entry:** | Test |
| **Pronunciation:** | [test] |
| **Function:** | noun |
| **Inflected Form(s):** | plural: tests |
| **Etymology:** | Latin *testum* |
| **First English use:** | 14th century, via Old French, "*pot*" from Latin *testum* "*earthenware pot*." The main modern meaning evolved from "*pot in which metals are heated*" via "*examination of properties or qualities*." |

1. **A series of questions, problems, or practical tasks to gauge somebody's knowledge, ability, or experience.**
2. **Basis for evaluation: a basis for evaluating or judging something or somebody.**

### EXAMINATION

| | |
|---|---|
| **Main Entry:** | ex·am·i·na·tion |
| **Pronunciation:** | [ig-ʻza-mmi-'nA-shun] |
| **Function:** | noun |
| **Inflected Form(s):** | plural: ex·am·i·na·tions |
| **Etymology:** | Latin *examinare* |
| **First English use:** | 14th century, from Latin *examinare* "*to weigh*." |

1. **The act or process of examining;  the state of being examined.**
2. **Education: an exercise designed to examine progress or qualification or depth of knowledge of a given subject.**
3. **A formal interrogation or inspection:  the process of probing something carefully with the aim of learning something.**

Tests are widely used in education for many reasons, ranging from program eligibility to identification of students. Tests are often confused with examinations or claimed to be the same thing. The first question to be answered should therefore be what is the difference between a test and an examination.

**Within the context of ESL/EFL**

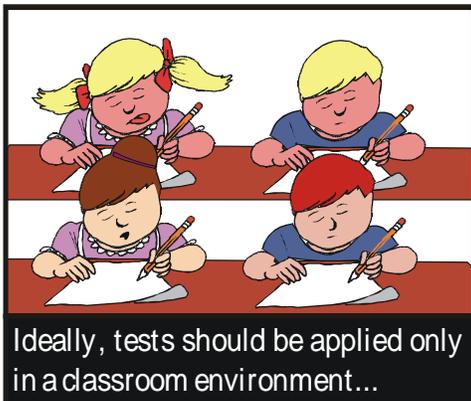What is the difference between a test and an examination?

| TEST | EXAMINATION |
|---|---|
| ▪ A Test should be a series of questions or practical tasks that guage a student's knowledge, ability, or experience in a specific area. (I.e. It should be the discrete point testing of narrow, specific topics of the language.) <br><br> ▪ A Test serves to answer the questions of whether the students have understood a particular facet of the language and if they apply the specific knowledge correctly. | ▪ An examination should be an exercise designed to examine the student's depth of knowledge of the second or foreign language. <br><br> ▪ An examination should establish beyond reasonable doubt, if and to what degree the students can apply their acquired language to initiate and maintain a conversation and or correspondence with a native English speaker as well as read, analyze and write a paper, a report or an essay. |

These definitions of a test and an examination disqualify by implication most of the so-called tests that are still applied today. For instance, universities use standardized 'tests' for admission to undergraduate and graduate programs, and many schools still need to produce evidence of 'progress' or make programmatic or administrative decisions with data obtained through the application of equally questionable 'tests'. Most of these so-called tests at the university and school level are questionable because the test results do not reflect a student's actual knowledge of a given subject but a student's ability to recall unrelated bits of knowledge in a random pattern. Thus it can be concluded that these 'tests' serve a bureaucratic requirement rather than any educational purpose or the purpose of establishing a level of education.
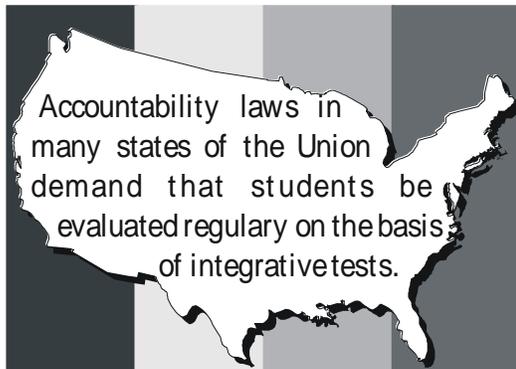


Ideally, tests should be applied only in a classroom environment...

Ideally, tests should be applied only in a classroom environment in the form of discrete points to help the teacher determine if the students have learned and understood the technicalities, i.e. application, variation or form of a specific subject item.

However, tests are more frequently used only in summative or integrative ways in an attempt to evaluate what happened. All too often, the wrong tests are used for important decisions. For example, tests like the SAT (Stanford Application Test), a widely used test at the school level in the USA, were never designed to judge school systems and teaching. Instead, assessments in the form of in-depth examinations should be used to measure teaching and student learning and thus the level of knowledge learned and understood.

The best example of such an examination is possibly the Cambridge University 'English Proficiency Test', which is not a 'test' at all but in reality an examination of an applicant's true knowledge of the English language. It includes the requirement to correct sentences, convert verbal expressions to formal English, define what was actually said in a dialogue, define tenses used, define word functions, define syllabic stress, write essays, etc.

Accountability laws in many states of the Union demand that students be evaluated regulary on the basis of integrative tests.

Tests like the SAT are one legacy of the American school reform movement that began in 1983 with the publication of "*A Nation at Risk*". These types of tests are concerned with accountability in the form of testing, i.e. the provision of meaningless numbers and statistics that satisfy political and bureaucratic purposes. They are in no way concerned with the questions of establishing if the educational program has met the students' learning needs and if the students have acquired and understood the conveyed knowledge and can apply it. Sadly, accountability laws in many States of the Union demand that students be 'evaluated' regularly on the basis of integrative tests.

The stakes are high for both schools and students, as in the case of Florida, where funds can be taken away from 'poorly performing' schools and awarded to other schools. Not only do reputation, status, and

GOALS
The worthy goal of increased student achievement has been replaced by the goal of higher test scores.

prestige hinge on average integrative test results, but also increasingly, the basic funding of schools is affected. In such cases, the worthy goal of increased student achievement has been replaced by the goal of higher test scores.

Therefore, the types of tests that demand that students recall bits of knowledge in a random pattern, yet in the form of "lottery" tests with 'yes/no' or 'multiple choice' answers, should be applied at a minimum in the classroom. It is the teachers' responsibility to establish by way of examinations, if an educational program has met the students' learning needs and the objectives of the curriculum.

## 3.1  The Criterion for Establishing a Test

A test of a specific ESL/EFL topic can have many forms. For example, it could be a Cloze test (fill in the missing word), select the proper words from a menu of words, correct the sentences, provide examples of the application of the topic, or simply conjugate verbs or form a noun, pronoun or adjective according to case, number or gender.

| **The possibilities are numerous. However, you should ask yourself the following questions before applying a test:** | |
|---|---|
| **a)** | What is the purpose of the test? |
| **b)** | Does it represent direct or indirect testing (or a mixture of both)? |
| **c)** | Are the items discrete point or integrative (or a mixture of both)? |
| **d)** | Which items are objective, and which are subjective? |
| | Can you order the subjective items according to degree of subjectivity? |
| **e)** | Does the test measure communicative abilities? |

The purpose of a test should always be within its narrow application, if your students have understood and can correctly apply a specific aspect of the language.

As a result of a test you should be able to decide, if you can move on to the next topic within the broader context of the lesson or module or if you need to repeat the topic in question.

| Purpose of a Test | ▪ If your students have understood specific aspects of the language. |
|---|---|
| | ▪ If students can correctly apply specific aspects of the language. |

## 3.2  The Criterion for Establishing an Examination

A sound example of what an examination entails is provided by the IELTS - the International English Language Testing System, that is applied by the University of Cambridge Language Examination Syndicate (UCLES) and all its worldwide affiliates.

The following details show which criteria should be applied when examining your students' knowledge of and facility to apply one, a combination of or all of the four skills of the English language. Note the sequence of skills, which divides the four skills into the so-called 'non-productive' skills (listening and reading) and 'productive' skills (writing and speaking).

# Listening

This should be an examination of listening comprehension in the context of general language proficiency.

The exam should be concerned with social needs, as well as with situations related to educational or training contexts.

An exam should include both monologues and dialogues between two or three people.

# Reading

The reading examination should consist of texts of general interest dealing with issues which are appropriate for, and accessible to students of the respective courses as well as their respective course levels.

The exam should also draw on social and training contexts and deal with general interest topics within this context.

# Speaking

The speaking examination can be administered in the form of an interview with an emphasis on general speaking skills. It assesses whether the students have the necessary knowledge and skills to communicate effectively with native speakers of English.

The exam should include an introduction, an extended discourse on some familiar topic, a phase where candidates are given a task card and encouraged to take the initiative and ask questions to elicit information; speculate about and discuss future plans, and a conclusion.
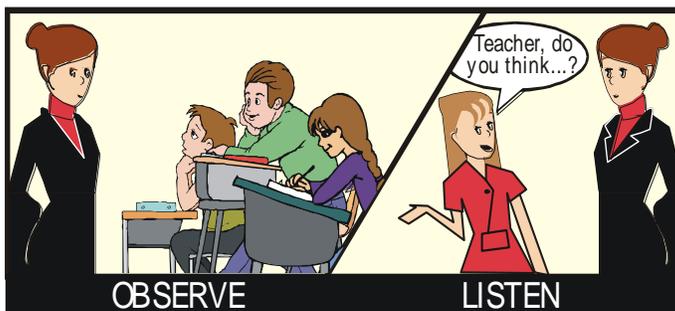
# Writing

The writing examination should consist of short essays or general reports, addressed to tutors or to an educated non-specialist audience.

The exam should require students to write personal semi-formal or formal correspondence, or to write on a given topic as part of a simulated class assignment.

The writing exam may consist of the students looking at a picture, chart or data table and to present the information they glean in their own words.

The students could also be presented with a point of view, argument or problem and asked to provide general factual information, outline and/or to present a solution, justify an opinion, and evaluate ideas and evidence.

# 4. ASSESSMENT

| | |
|---|---|
| **Main Entry:** | as·sess·ment |
| **Pronunciation:** | [às'sess·ment] |
| **Function:** | noun |
| **Inflected Form(s):** | plural: as·sess·ments |
| **Etymology:** | Latin *assidere* |
| **First English use:** | 18th century, via Old French, "*assesser*" from Latin *assidere* "*sit by*", later "*levy tax*". |

1. **Assessment:  a judgement about something based on an understanding of the situation.**
2. **Educational assessment: a method of assessing performance and attainment.**

## 4.1  Assessment in the Classroom

Assessment in the classroom is an approach designed to help teachers find out what students are learning in the classroom and how well they are learning it. It is a form of gathering information that ultimately permits an evaluation or passing a judgement.



Assessment differs from tests and examinations in so far that it is applied on an on-going basis in a mostly non-formal form. In other words, assessment is reflective of the teacher's power of observation and skill of listening to the students.

**Assessment in the classroom has the following characteristics:**

**a)  Learner-Centered**   The learner-centered assessment focuses the teacher's primary attention on observing and improving learning, rather than on observing and improving teaching. It can provide information to guide teachers and students in making adjustments to improve learning.

**b)  Teacher-Directed**   The teacher directed assessment respects the autonomy, academic freedom, and professional judgement of the teacher. The individual teacher decides what to assess, how to assess, and how to respond to the information gained through the assessment. Also, the teacher is not obliged to share the result of the assessment with anyone outside the classroom.

**c) Mutually Beneficial**   Because it is focused on learning, assessment in the classroom requires the active participation of students. By cooperating in assessment, students reinforce their grasp of the course content and strengthen their own skills at self-assessment. Their motivation is increased when they realize that their teacher is interested and has invested in their success as learners.

Teachers also sharpen their teaching focus by continually asking themselves three questions:

- "What are the essential skills and knowledge I am trying to teach?"
- "How can I find out whether students are learning them?"
- "How can I help students learn better?"

As teachers work closely with students to answer these questions, they improve their teaching skills and gain new insights.

**d) Formative**   The purpose of assessment in the classroom is to improve the quality of student learning, not to provide evidence for evaluating or grading students. The assessment is almost never graded and is almost always anonymous.

**e) Context-Specific**   Assessment in the classroom has to respond to the particular needs and characteristics of the teacher, the students, and the disciplines to which they are applied. What works well in one class will not necessarily work in another.

**f) Ongoing**   Assessment in the classroom is an ongoing process, best thought of as the creation and maintenance of a classroom "feedback loop." By using a number of simple assessment techniques that are quick and easy to use, teachers get feedback from students on their learning. The teacher then completes the loop by providing students with feedback on the results of the assessment and suggestions for improving learning. To check on the usefulness of their suggestions, the teacher uses classroom assessment again, continuing the "feedback loop." As the approach becomes integrated into everyday classroom practice, the communications loop, connecting the teacher and his or her students, becomes more efficient and more effective.

**g) Rooted in Good Teaching Practice**   Assessment in the classroom is an attempt to build on existing good practice by making feedback on students' learning more systematic, more flexible, and more effective. Teachers already ask questions, react to students' questions, monitor body language and facial expressions, read homework and tests, and so on. Assessment in the classroom provides a way to integrate assessment systematically and seamlessly into the traditional classroom teaching and learning process   As they are teaching, teachers monitor and react to students' questions, comments, body language, and facial expressions in an almost automatic fashion. This "automatic" information gathering and impression formation is a subconscious and implicit process.

## 4.2 Assessment in the Classroom is based on Seven Assumptions:

**One of the most important and promising ways to improve learning is to improve teaching!**

1. The quality of student learning is directly, although not exclusively, related to the quality of teaching. Therefore, one of the most promising ways to improve learning is to improve teaching.

2. To improve their effectiveness, teachers need first to make their goals and objectives explicit and then to get specific, comprehensible feedback on the extent to which they are achieving those goals and objectives.

**Students need to receive appropriate and focused feedback early and often.**

3. To improve their learning, students need to receive appropriate and focused feedback early and often; they also need to learn how to assess their own learning.

4. The type of assessment most likely to improve teaching and learning is that conducted by teachers to answer questions they themselves have formulated in response to issues or problems in their own teaching.

- Motivation
- Growth
- Renewal
- Assessment

5. Systematic inquiry and intellectual challenge are powerful sources of motivation, growth, and renewal for college teachers, and assessment in the classroom can provide such challenge.

Specialized Training

6. Assessment in the classroom does not require specialized training. It can be carried out by any dedicated teacher.

The students worked great this morning... Oh yes, they did!

7. By collaborating with colleagues and actively involving students in assessment efforts, teachers (and students) enhance learning and personal satisfaction.

## 4.3 Starting Small

To begin assessment in the classroom, it is recommended that only one or two of the simplest assessment techniques be tried in only one class. This way very little planning or preparation time and energy of the teacher and students is risked.

**5-10 Minutes!** …is all it takes to try out a simple assessment technique

In most cases, trying out a simple assessment technique will require only five to ten minutes of class time and less than an hour of time out of class. After trying one or two quick assessments, the decision as to whether this approach is worth further investment of time and energy can be made.

**This process of starting small involves three steps:**

Step 1: **Planning**
Select one, and only one, of your classes in which to try out the Classroom Assessment. Decide on the class meeting and select a Classroom Assessment Technique. Choose a simple and quick one.

Step 2: **Implementing**
Make sure the students know what you are doing and that they clearly understand the procedure. Collect the responses and analyze them as soon as possible.

Step 3: **Responding**
To capitalize on time spent assessing, and to motivate students to become actively involved, "close the feedback loop" by letting them know what you learned from the assessments and what difference that information will make.

### 4.4 Five Suggestions for a Successful Start

**The five suggestions for a successful start to assessment in the classroom include:**

1. If an assessment technique does not appeal to your intuition and professional judgement as a teacher, **don't use it**.

2. Don't make assessment into a self-inflicted chore or burden.

3. Don't ask your students to use any assessment technique you haven't previously tried on yourself.

4. Allow for more time than you think you will need to carry out and respond to the assessment.

Allow for more time than you think you will need...

5. Make sure to "**close the loop**." Let students know what you learned from their feedback and how you (and they) can use that information to improve learning.

### 4.5    The Adaptive Dimension



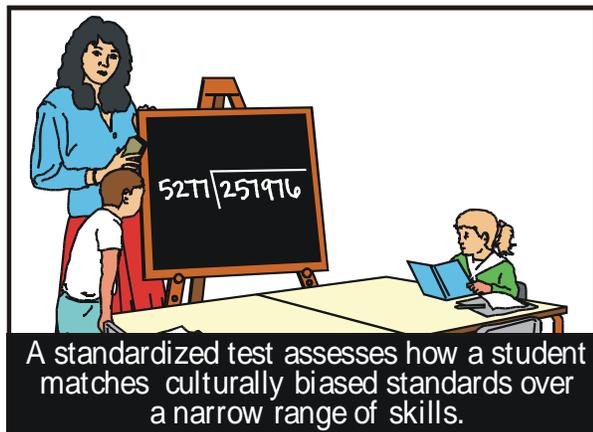At the start of any class, you have a group of "new" students.

At the start of any class, you, the teacher, have a group of 'new' students. The students are new, even if they know each other or know you, because they will be dealing with different material, from a different point of view, within an evolving system of interactions. The factors of literacy and the learning objectives for the curriculum become the criteria by which to assess the students' learning and progress. These may be easily attainable by the majority of students, but some will need extra support to reach their potential. Adaptations to materials or approaches will be required.

Graded teaching resources and standardized tests are built on what is accepted as normal or average for a student of that age group and often for a specific segment of society. A standardized test assesses how a student matches culturally biased standards over a narrow range of skills.

The results must be considered in that context. This measure may be unattainable by some students. Alternatively, some students may not reach full potential because they are not challenged but are allowed to remain at the "acceptable average". The **Adaptive Dimension** recognizes that the needs of all students must be considered for effective teaching and learning to occur.
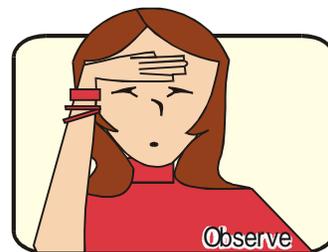
In assessing the factors of literacy, methods can be established for addressing knowledge, values, and abilities in ways that suit the nature of the factor. The factors of literacy can be assessed through manipulation of factual knowledge. However, it is quite possible to assess only factual knowledge and this is a fault of much current student assessment. When examined, this assessment is often little more than simple recall or limited application of facts.



A standardized test assesses how a student matches culturally biased standards over a narrow range of skills.

When assessment does go further and appears to include abilities, often too much emphasis is still devoted to straight recall. Students deserve to be assessed on the range of abilities they have been using and developing during instruction. The overall assessment plan should reflect the students' different learning styles, their different ways of displaying their learning, and the nature of the abilities being assessed. Self-referenced assessment may be one aspect to investigate.
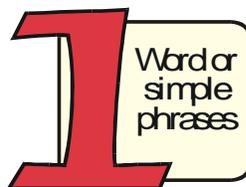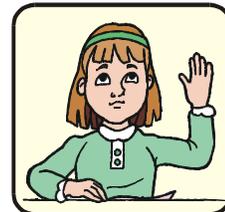
Assessment can be oral, written, practical, or some combination of these. Practical exercises are the best way to assess knowledge <u>and</u> skills. For example, the ability to read a chart is not the same as knowing how best to use and express the information the chart presents.

- The best way to assess whether students can perform an activity is to observe them while they are actually performing the activity.

- Ask them probing questions. The use of anecdotal records, observation checklists, and rating scales can assist in data collection as these observations are taking place.

- The types of tasks and questions which students are expected to address influence their responses. When the tasks and questions are limited, so are the responses.

- Tasks and questions which elicit only one word or simple sentence answers usually test basic recall of factual knowledge.

It is very important to consider that once students have, for example, formulated a model in a particular context during an activity and if that exact same context is given in the assessment, the response is recall, and not a test of any conceptual or process ability.

Valid assessment of the ability requires slightly different conditions so the ability is tested through a new set of events.

> ■ Good questioning is extremely important for effective teaching and testing. Avoid using only questions that have a single acceptable response.
>
> ■ Structure questions so that some type of reasoning is required. "How...", "why...", and "explain..." are stems you can use to create divergent questions.
>
> ■ Present problem solving activities.
>
> ■ Develop critical and creative thinking.

It promotes and challenges higher level thinking. Ask yourself whether your questions to the students, and the students' questions to each other and to you, require **reporting knowledge**, **using knowledge**, or **creating knowledge**. Try to ensure a good mix of question types.

> ■ Ask your students to interpret a graph or photograph, or to answer a question orally. Assessment does not have to consist totally of written work.
>
> ■ Varied formats adapt to students' differing learning styles and allow students to show what they have learned.
>
> ■ Summative assessment items following the completion of a unit can cover more **scope** and **depth** than formative assessment items.

Apart from the scope and depth of the activities selected, the format of summative assignments can be just as varied, including practical tasks (to reflect practical knowledge and abilities), interpretation of graphs and photographs, and investigative problems and assignments.

Multiple choice, true or false, or fill-in-the-blank tests (formative assessments) usually assess only basic factual recall. **Such tests should be used as little as possible** and fewer "marks" should be awarded them in comparison with those items that require more complex abilities. Multiple choice questions, which test higher level abilities than recall can be constructed, but the process of construction is long and difficult.

Essay questions are useful examinations of understanding and ability to synthesize and evaluate. They can indicate an understanding of all Dimensions of Literacy, and should be used in the realm of assessment. Students who have difficulty writing may be given the option of alternative forms of communication to express their understanding of the concepts (see Module 3 - *Multiple Intelligence*, Learning Preferences).

Essay Questions... are useful examinations of understanding and ability to synthesize and evaluate

Illustrations or art projects, an oral report, a concept map, a project, journal writing, or some other challenging activity may serve as innovative alternatives to the written essay. Care must be taken to provide writing opportunities and guidance to improve if students are having difficulty with writing. Always keep in mind the importance of assessing understanding of the objectives, whichever format is used.

## 4.6  Project Work

Projects are useful items for summative assessment. Students can explore a topic in depth, and use a range of process abilities. If the project is a group effort, difficulties might arise in assessing the individual participation of each student.

The contributions and participation of individuals within a group can often be determined by structuring the tasks, assigning roles, and observing the ways in which the group members interact with one another. Using student self-assessment is another avenue to determining individual contributions and participation.

**LEARNING CENTERS**
**Assessment stations are particularly useful for allowing students to demonstrate their competence.**

The number and type of assignments completed in a learning center can be recorded as a summative assessment. Assessment stations are particularly useful for allowing students to demonstrate their competence.

### 4.7 Building Bridges from Assessment to Evaluation



Assessing values is an emerging area of assessment and evaluation. At one time, values were not considered a part of the school's written curriculum. Parents and society certainly required that students develop acceptable behaviors and attitudes, but these were promoted through the "hidden curriculum" - the teachers' and school's influences.

Now, specific attitudes and values are to be openly promoted in students, so the teacher's influence must be directed to these objectives. Accordingly, they must be assessed. For further information on values review Chapter VI in *Understanding the Common Essential Learning: A Handbook for Teachers* (Saskatchewan Education, 1988). Both in questioning and in the matter of values, there is a need for knowledge about the influence of culture on communications. Teachers must recognize, be sensitive to, and respect cultural differences. Values are a direct result of culture and as such, the connection between values and culture may need to be made explicit.

There are valid reasons to assess students' values and attitude outcomes at school and to attempt to promote these with effective teaching methods and individual student reflection. Since the values of the factors of literacy may be developed over time, teachers should be emphasizing many of the same values through the grades, but developing them to higher levels. This cumulative development helps to take students to a point where the level achieved may become a feature of their characters, and may continue to develop further in adult life.



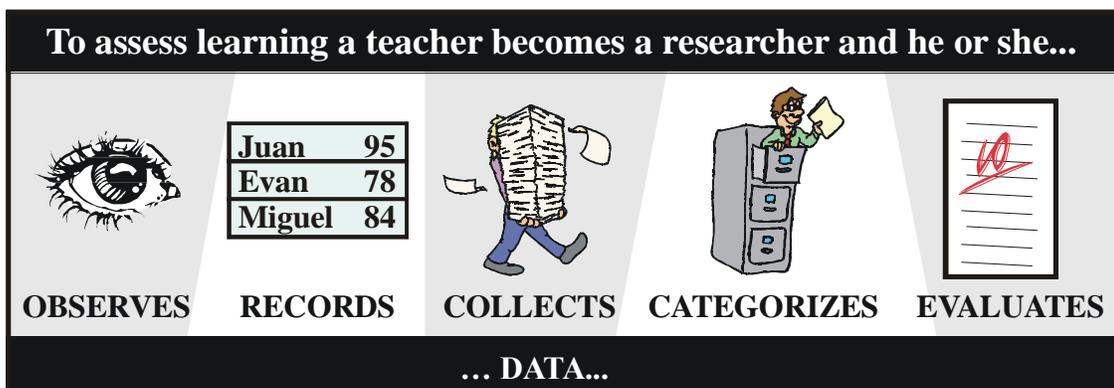**Teachers must recognize, be sensitive to, and respect cultural differences.**

## 4.8  Classroom Assessment: Purpose, Issues, and Strategies
  *by John Albertini*

### 4.8.1  Purpose of Classroom Assessment

As teachers we are expected to assess and evaluate students' learning and to help colleagues in other departments do the same. Whatever our approach to teaching, we must assign grades and prepare students for programmatic assessment.

Much of what we do in the classroom is determined by the assessment structures we work under. In the field of second language assessment, the return to the direct assessment, is seen as an attempt to make the assessment structures we work under more valid. In some school districts and colleges, portfolio assessment is being used as an alternative to testing. Here, I argue that the best assessment in the classroom is an on-going, descriptive documentation of behavior and attitude. Conscientious assessment at this level will allow us to move more freely in the harnesses of program-level evaluation.



**To assess learning a teacher becomes a researcher and he or she...**

| OBSERVES | RECORDS | COLLECTS | CATEGORIZES | EVALUATES |

Juan     95
Evan     78
Miguel   84

**… DATA...**

The assessment strategies considered here are both valid and manageable at the classroom level; that is, they reflect real learning behaviors and strategies that teachers already use for instructional purposes.

To assess learning, a teacher becomes a researcher, and he or she observes, records, collects, categorizes and evaluates data. The data includes documentation of changes in attitude and knowledge as well as the acquisition of skill. Because we want the student to become involved in the assessment process, the strategies go beyond observation by the teacher and include collaboration with and reflection by the student. Finally, it is important to note that assessment activities may be conducted in more than one language, i.e. the native and the second or foreign language.
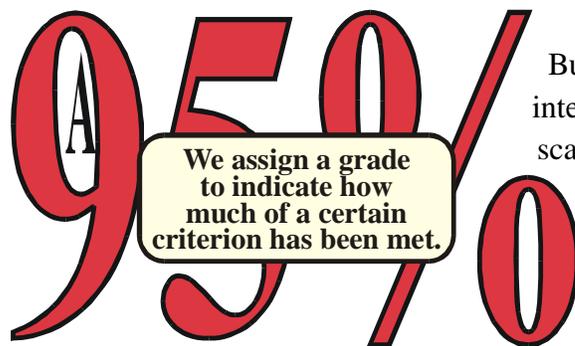
### 4.8.2 Assessment and Evaluation

When I ask teachers what they remember about evaluation of their own writing, they recall corrections in red ink, marginal comments, and no comments at all. They recall feelings of surprise, when, daring to take a risk, they are penalized for doing so. They also recall critical but encouraging comments from some instructors. Along with a shift in emphasis from product to process, has come the point of view that not all learning should be evaluated.

It may be useful to distinguish between everyday documentation and periodic judgement. Here, I take assessment to mean analysis and interpretation of that data for the purposes of grading or placement. Traditionally, we have graded and corrected students' responses. Recent experience and research suggest that we should also consider rating holistically and responding without evaluation.

### 4.8.3 Grading versus Rating

Grading is the practice of assigning points or letter grades to a work according to certain criteria. We assign a grade to indicate how much of a certain criterion has been met. Assuming we have the same criterion for all our students, a grade of "B" should mean the same thing from student to student.

> We assign a grade to indicate how much of a certain criterion has been met.

But grading involves a scale composed of intervals; and the intervals or units on this scale may be added and subtracted.

Rating (or "ranking") involves a different kind of scale. Here, judges rate the quality or relative "goodness" of writing samples along an ordinal scale. Examples of such scales are holistic rating scales with values ranging from 1 to 6 points, 0- to 100-points, or "poor" to "excellent." Holistic ratings are now preferred over indirect, multiple-choice assessments of skills for students of English as a second language.

Holistic ratings are used also to place new students in developmental courses and to admit students into degree-prerequisite courses. Students are given thirty minutes to write a short essay about first impressions. Each essay is rated on a scale of 0-100 points by three experienced English instructors, and the three ratings are averaged to yield a single score.

The scoring procedure directs attention to four categories - content, organization, language and vocabulary - and is thus a "modified holistic" rating procedure. Training and the practice of averaging the English instructors' scores increase the reliability of the score. For English instructors interested in improving the reliability of classroom ratings, such a procedure is feasible. It only requires collaboration and some consensus among instructors.

| THE SCORING PROCEDURE DIRECTS ATTENTION TO **4** CATEGORIES | |
| --- | --- |
| CONTENT | LANGUAGE |
| ORGANIZATION | MECHANICS |

When a colleague asks for advice about grading students' reports and is overwhelmed by the report's grammatical anomalies and departures from the expected format, I suggest that the colleague not assign a single letter grade to the report. Rather, I advise grading content, organization, language, and mechanics separately. A concern for the improvement of reports has led to much improved collaboration among English teachers.

### 4.8.4 Correcting versus Responding

The efficacy of correcting students' works continues to be debated. Accuracy, fluency, and general language proficiency of students of German in Minnesota was enhanced by practice, not error correction.

In a study of home and school influences on low-income students' literacy, researchers report that instructional techniques that rely heavily on teacher corrections, may be especially frustrating to students who confront their tasks with little confidence in their ability to say something of interest to others.
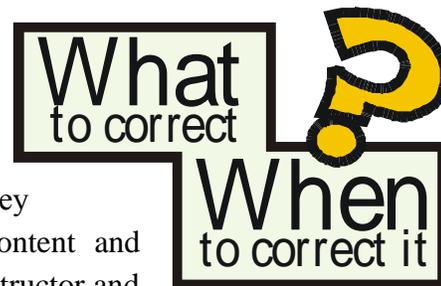
Accuracy, fluency, and general language proficiency... can be enhanced by PRACTICE not ERROR CORRECTION

Anecdotal reports from adult writers indicate that the sight of school papers "bleeding with red ink" adversely affected their motivation to write. On the other hand, teachers of English as a Second Language argue that, as editors, mentors, and surrogate audiences for academic writing, they cannot abrogate the responsibility to correct unsubstantiated conclusions or depart from standard form and acceptable usage.

With adult students, negotiating an appropriate time and context for correction is one solution.

Also, selective correction of only those errors related to the main objective of an assignment will reduce student frustration and increase learning. In a lab report, the steps of a particular test must be reported accurately. Clear description of grammatical errors related to clarity and intelligibility is suggested. Sentence level grammatical errors need to be categorized as either "global" or "local" mistakes. Missing or inappropriate clausal connectors and tense inflections are "global" in that they affect overall intelligibility more than missing noun inflections and articles ("local" mistakes).

What to correct is one question; another is, when to correct it. For several years now, advocates have suggested that we reserve grammatical correction to final, "pre-publication" stages of writing. A new writer, they argue, should be allowed to focus first on content and arrangement, then on style and mechanics. An instructor and other readers can promote continued writing and revision by reflecting what is seen, heard or felt in the piece. Such feedback may be simply the reiteration of striking works, phrases or ideas and is decidedly non-evaluative.

Comments such as "I like…," "I don't like…," and "You should...," are withheld. Responding without correction in teacher-student conferences and in writer groups may be particularly effective with writers whose concern for correctness interferes with concept formation and fluency. The creation of "evaluation-free zones" at the beginning of each semester improves both students' writing and their attitude towards it.

Non-evaluative response establishes a connection between writer and reader. A student writes to satisfy a requirement; a writer writes to connect with a reader. Responding to a student's text with experiences of our own shows a personal connection to that text. Such connections should motivate a student to continue writing. I once asked a colleague to comment on a personal piece of writing concerning a student's violence at home. My colleague's response began, "I remember when I was so angry that I…".

### 4.8.5 Strategies

Classroom assessment of writing begins with the teacher but involves the student as soon as possible. The teacher may use logs, checklists or grids. Logs and checklists document work completed but also milestones and problems along the way. A grid worksheet, which is a list of criteria plus a simple rating, is a useful way of summarizing an assessment of one piece or a collection of pieces in student-teacher communication. An analytical grid may help to comment on student papers and to provide evaluation.

> Students are drawn into the assessment of their own writing through dialogues and interviews.

Students are drawn into the assessment of their own writing through dialogues and interviews. Teachers may begin individual dialogues by asking students to write about the pieces under consideration. The student should describe what was attempted, what was achieved, and what the next step will be. A dialogue journal is an interactive context where writing may be discussed in writing.

> **Three ground rules for dialogue journal writing are that:**
> **1)** teacher and student are partners,
> **2)** the content of the journal is negotiated, and
> **3)** the writing is never corrected.

In this context, the teacher responds on a personal level to what the student has written. In class a dialogue journal may become a notebook where experiences are traded, past experiences are recalled, and views are discussed. This interactive writing may be used to seed other, more formal pieces of writing outside of the journal. For some students, the journal context helps trigger recall of experience and reflection on the writing process. If students are willing to comment regularly on their strengths and weaknesses, a longitudinal self-assessment is compiled by the end of the course.
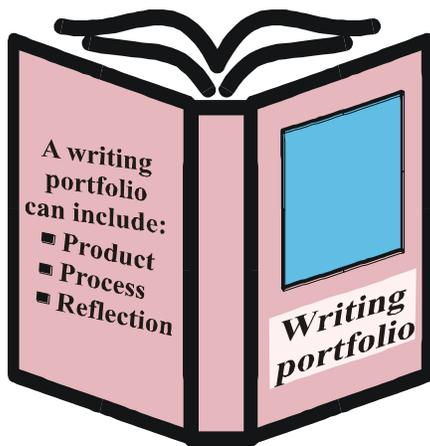
Self-assessment and reflection are our ultimate goals. Questionnaires, student logs and journals will prompt students to consider their strengths and weaknesses.

> ...the journal context helps trigger recall of experiences and reflection on the writing process.

The writing portfolio is another context where reflection is appropriate. The inclusion of written reflection is what distinguishes writing portfolios from art or investment portfolios. Like these others, writing portfolios are longitudinal in nature, diverse in content, and collaborative in ownership and composition (assuming that the student has received feedback on various drafts from instructor and classmates).
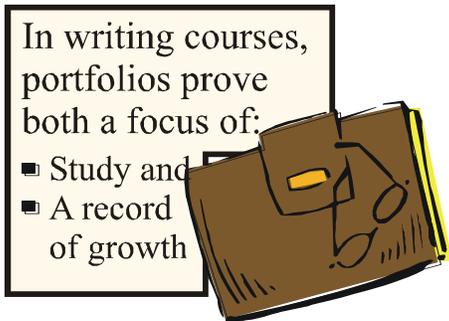
Unlike artists or investors, however, the student is asked to reflect on content and process and to provide some sort of introduction to the pieces. Such commentary may take the form of a "letter to the reader" or short process descriptions preceding each piece. Inviting students to narrate the contents of their portfolios should elicit evaluative comments like, "One of my strengths in writing is…", and "My writing style has changed very much within the last year or so!"

In practice, writing portfolios combine several forms of documentation and evaluation. A writing portfolio can include product, process and reflection. Product and process allows others to evaluate the acquisition of skill; reflection reveals the student's attitude and point of view. As an assessment tool, the writing portfolio compares favorably with standardized indirect measures of writing with regard to validity. Given the complexity and variety of real writing tasks, a collection of final drafts written on different topics at different times is more valid than a single sample of writing as well. To the extent that the creation of a portfolio in English as a Second Language mirrors the writing process followed in other college courses, it is a valid and relevant assessment of a student's academic writing ability.

On the other hand, the individuality and variety inherent in this method make it difficult to estimate the reliability of portfolio assessment. Comparability and replication of the evaluations of the portfolios is the issue. Ratings across portfolios become more stable to the extent that we can elicit the ratings of colleagues who read the final drafts with the same criteria as we do. One additional rating greatly improves the reliability of a final evaluation; and an additional set of comments provides the student with objective feedback in the sense that it is a response from someone who has not been involved in the process of writing the pieces.

Teachers who use portfolios as an assessment tool report that they have had a salutary effect on their teaching. In writing courses, they proved both a focus of study and a record of growth.

In writing courses, portfolios prove both a focus of:
- Study and
- A record of growth

For students (and teachers) unfamiliar with the method, it is advisable to conduct periodic portfolio checks and to assign preliminary grades based on quantity and quality.
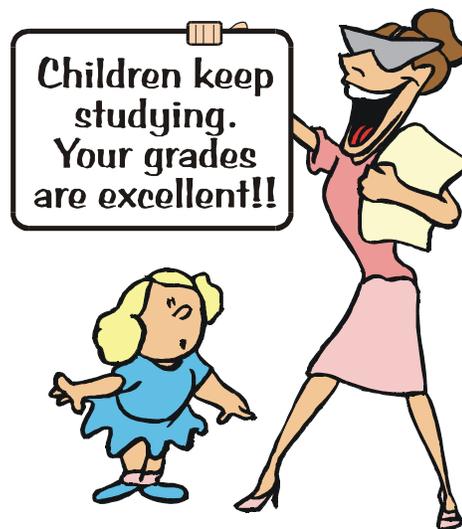
A working portfolio implies but does not ensure genuine revision. If we ask colleagues to rate and comment on our students' portfolios, we need to provide explicit rating guidelines and a reasonable number of portfolios to read. On a rating scale of 1 to 5, for example, what does a "5" mean? Suitable for publication in a school or college magazine?

### 4.8.6 Conclusion

The techniques described here are simply ways of recording observations and gathering samples. Their use serves a dual purpose: to document learning and to foster maturity. Use of these techniques will make students aware of the process and problems, solutions and changes in their own writing. It will also help us loosen the reins without losing sight of the goals.

We can encourage risk-taking and also teach editing. Most importantly, when the time comes for evaluation, we can provide students with multiple assessments of performance and documentation of change.

Children keep studying. Your grades are excellent!!

Descriptive methods may be used by the teacher, by teacher and student together, and by the student alone. In using descriptive modes of assessment versus standardized tests, we trade uniformity, balance and sometimes breadth for variety, individuality, and depth.

Descriptive assessments can augment shallow information we get from standardized test scores. Used alone, standardized tests become blinders, fixing our gaze on a narrow path, a limited characterization of a student's abilities. Some have suggested that the use of portfolios may provide the desired link between classroom assessment and large-scale testing, or that placement essays be used in conjunction with portfolio assessment.

**STANDARDIZED TEST**

**Used alone, standardized tests become blinders, fixing our gaze on a narrow path, a limited characterization of student's abilities.**

Thus, if we use longitudinal assessment of student writing we may be able to work more easily within institutional structures and, ultimately, we may be able to change them.

## 4.9 Classroom Assessment and Instruction

*A response to J. Albertini by the Greater London Board of Education*

Classroom assessment informs teachers about students' progress. This type of authentic assessment can be so integrated into our instruction that similar activities serve as both instruction and assessment. We can think of authentic assessment as the "clean plate test".

If your family or guests have enjoyed a meal, you don't need to give them multiple choice tests to find out how they liked your cooking. Just see how many empty plates are left on the table.

As you build multiple ways of demonstrating knowledge into instruction, you have also automatically built in

Classroom assessment informs teachers about students' progress.

assessment of student progress precisely connected to your curriculum. This type of assessment also provides important feedback on instruction, allowing you to adjust to meet the needs of all students.

In addition, multiple types of assessment should include standardized measures that demonstrate that language students are attaining standards for academic achievement.

### 4.9.1  Adapting content assessment for ESL/EFL students

It is important to remember that students who are still in the process of learning English must be supported in learning grade-level academic content. They should be challenged to exercise critical thinking skills, such as analysis or synthesis, during all stages of language acquisition, even while they are in the pre-production stage.
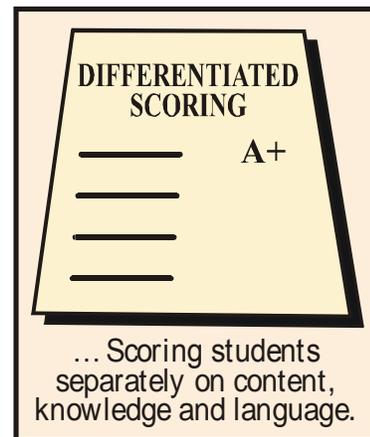
Students should be challenged to exercise critical thinking skills such as analysis or synthesis during all stages of language acquisition.

At the same time, understanding of academic subjects must be assessed in a way that allows students to demonstrate their knowledge somewhat independently of their fluency in English. Three techniques for assessing content while reducing language difficulties are scaffolding, differentiated scoring, and visible criteria.

**Scaffolding assessment** allows students various ways to demonstrate their knowledge: exhibits or projects, graphic organizers (diagrams or semantic maps), organized lists of concepts, labeled tables or graphs completed by the students, or short answers. Students should be allowed extended time limits for completing scaffolded assessments.

A second method for assessment is **differentiated scoring**, that is, scoring students separately on content, knowledge and on language. This also integrates assessment of language arts in other content areas. Students might be scored on sentence structure and the use of key vocabulary from the lesson. In addition, they would be scored on how well they understood key concepts, how accurate their answers were, and how well they demonstrated the processes they used to derive their answers.

**DIFFERENTIATED SCORING**

A+

…Scoring students separately on content, knowledge and language.

A third method for adapting assessment is to use **visible or explicit criteria** for scoring. Students become familiar with scoring criteria before the actual assessment is given, especially if they will be scored separately on content, knowledge and language conventions (differentiated scoring).

Students might be involved in creating criteria for a good report or steps in solving a word problem. They should practice applying these criteria to actual examples, in order to become familiar with the criteria.

### 4.9.2 Performance-Based and Portfolio Assessment

**Definition of Terms:**

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• **Informal or Alternative Assessment**

These are not technical terms, so there are no uniformly accepted definitions. Informal and alternative assessments are used interchangeably. They indicate the following:

- Any method, other than a standardized test, of determining what a student knows or can do.
- Activities that reflect tasks typical of classroom instruction and real-life settings, and that represent actual progress toward curricular goals and objectives.
- Activities that are monitored and recorded in some way, either by teacher observation, peer observation or student self-assessment.

It should also be noted that informal and alternative assessment measures are by definition criterion-referenced, (e.g. learners are classified according to whether or not they are able to successfully perform a set of tasks, or meet a set of objectives).

Norm-referenced tests, on the other hand, relate one learner's performance against the normative performance of a group. Standardized tests can be either norm- or criterion-referenced.

• **Performance-Based Assessment**

This is a type of informal or alternative assessment. It is characterized by:

- Activities that are specifically designed to assess performance on one or more instructional tasks.
- Activities in which students demonstrate specific skills, and competencies are rated on a predetermined scale of achievement or proficiency.
- Activities that are rated by a teacher or other professional, rather than by peer or self-evaluation.

• **Portfolio Assessment**

This is a technique for qualitative evaluation. It is characterized by:

- The maintenance of descriptive records of a variety of student work over time.
- The purposeful and systematic collection of student work that reflects growth toward the achievement of specific curricular objectives.
- The inclusion of student self-assessment as well as teacher self-appraisal.

Portfolio assessment in ESL has been used mainly to follow progress in reading and writing. Portfolios can, but need not necessarily, contain samples of student writing, records of oral language progress, records on reading achievement over time, and information on the results of formal achievement tests.
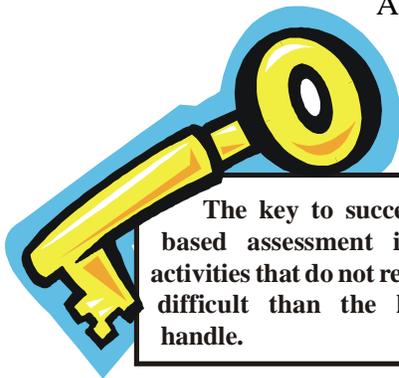
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### 4.9.3 Types of Language Performance-Based Assessment

Performance-based assessment should not be limited to a single activity type. In fact, using performance-based tasks gives teachers the freedom to probe with language that formal measures often lack. Whatever activity type is used, never assess more than three items at a

**3**

> **Whatever activity type is used, <u>never</u> assess more than 3 items at a time.**

time. For instance, a role-play might be designed to see if students can respond to "what" and "where" questions; ask for or respond to clarification; and read addresses or telephone numbers. Any more detail would be difficult for students at Level 1 to integrate, and even more difficult for teachers to rate.

Activities should be as authentic and integrated as possible. If reading or writing would be a natural occurrence within a given context that is mainly geared to oral communication, then it should be part of the assessment.

> **The key to successful performance-based assessment is the creation of activities that do not rely on language more difficult than the level students can handle.**

Whether oral or literacy activities are being devised, the key to successful performance-based assessment is the creation of activities that do not rely on language more difficult than the level students can handle.

Activities that pair students or use group interaction are the most numerous. They are often more natural than teacher-student interaction, save classroom time, and give the teacher the ability to listen and watch more closely while acting as rater for one or more students.

**Oral activity types include:**



| Role play | Student-student description (using picture or written prompts) | Oral reporting to whole class | Telling a picture story — using a sequence of three or more pictures |

| | | Debates |
|---|---|---|
| **Interviews** (using written prompts) | **Completing the conversation** (using picture or written prompts) | either one-on-one, or small group, with turn-taking |
| **Brain-storming** | **Passing the message on** among 3-6 students | **Giving instructions from picture, diagram, or written prompts** |
| **Completing incomplete stories** | **Games** | ORAL ACTIVITY TYPES |

### 4.9.4 Features of Portfolio Assessment

Portfolios are files that contain a variety of information assessing student performance relative to instructional objectives. They are a practical way of assessing student work throughout the entire course.

**Portfolios can include:**

- Samples of student work, such as stories, completed forms, exercise sheets, pictures drawn and captioned by students, or other written work.
- Tapes of oral work, such as role play or presentations.
- Teacher descriptions of student accomplishments, such as performance on oral tasks.
- Formal test data.
- Checklists and rating sheets.

Like performance-based assessment, portfolios encourage teachers to use a variety of ways to evaluate learning and to do so over time. These multiple indicators of student performance are a better cross-check for student progress than one type of measure alone.

> Multiple indicators of student performance are a better crosscheck for student progress than one type of measure alone. ✓

While it is each student's responsibility to put his/her "best work" in the portfolio file, it is the teacher's responsibility to choose the categories of work that should be placed in the file, e.g., a written story about people; a description of surroundings; a tape of an oral account of a trip. Student work should be collected with a purpose, and each item a student places in the file should reflect progress toward a particular learning goal. In addition, teachers need to maintain checklists or summary sheets of tasks and performances in the student's portfolio, to help them look systematically across students, to make instructional decisions, and to report consistently and reliably.

**PORTFOLIO CONTENTS FORM**

Portfolio contents forms will ensure that the same kinds of data are collected for each student...

Finally, a Portfolio Contents Form will ensure that the same kinds of data are collected for each student, so the results can be used to assess progress for each student and for the class as a whole.

**Portfolios may be particularly appropriate for use with highly mobile migrant students in addition to ESL/EFL students for the following reasons:**

1. For students moving from one teacher or school to another, portfolios can pass along critical information on their strengths and needs so the new teacher does not duplicate assessments that have already been conducted.

2. For students being considered for placement at different levels within an ESL program, portfolio results can determine their ability to function at various levels.

3. For students being considered for transition from an ESL or bilingual education program to a mainstream, English-only program, portfolio results can measure performance relative to classmates in the mainstream.

4. For students being considered for pre-referral to special education programs, portfolio results can be used to determine whether performance is related to language proficiency, including both native language and English literacy skills.

**4.9.5  Sample Portfolio Analysis** - Rating Criteria (5 being the highest).

**5  R a t i n g  C r i t e r i a**

- Vocabulary is precise, varied, and vivid.
- Organization is appropriate to writing assignment and contains clear introduction, development of ideas, and conclusion.
- Transition from one idea to another is smooth and provides the reader with clear understanding that the topic is changing.
- Meaning is conveyed effectively.
- A few mechanical errors may be present but do not disrupt communication.
- Student shows a clear understanding of writing and topic development.

**3  R a t i n g  C r i t e r i a**

- Vocabulary is simple.
- Organization is extremely simple or there is evidence of disorganization. There are a few transitional markers or repetitive transitional markers.
- Meaning is frequently clear.
- Mechanical errors affect communication.
- Student shows some understanding of writing and topic development.

**4  R a t i n g  C r i t e r i a**

- Events are organized logically, but some part of the sample may not be fully developed.
- Vocabulary is adequate for grade level developed.
- Some transition of ideas is evident.
- Meaning is conveyed but breaks down at times.
- Student shows a good understanding of writing and topic development.

**2  R a t i n g  C r i t e r i a**

- Vocabulary is limited and repetitious.
- Sample is composed of only a few disjointed sentences.
- No transitional markers.
- Meaning is unclear.
- Mechanical errors cause serious disruption in communication.

**1  R a t i n g  C r i t e r i a**

- Student shows little evidence of discourse understanding.
- Responds with a few isolated words.
- No complete sentences are written.
- No evidence of concepts of writing.

**0  R a t i n g  C r i t e r i a**

- No response
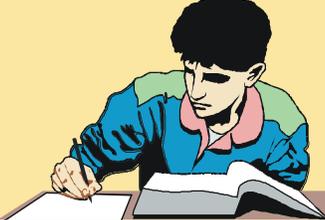
**4.9.6  Using Portfolio Results**

Portfolio results can be used in a variety of ways. The Sample Portfolio Analysis is an essential component in many of these uses:
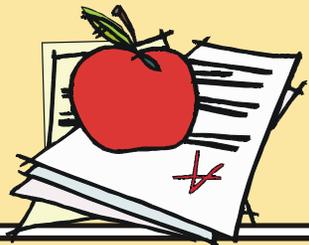
- **diagnosis and placement** – Student's strengths and needs are examined with regard to major curriculum objectives.

- **monitoring student progress** - Growth in learning over the course of the semester or school year can be monitored.

> Portfolio results can be used in a variety of ways.

- **feedback on the effectiveness of instruction** - If individual students are not progressing, the instructional approach should be re-evaluated and appropriate adaptations made to meet each student's needs. One possible conclusion is that a student needs instructional support beyond the services provided in the class(es) in which the portfolio has been maintained.

- **communication with other teachers** - This includes other members of the portfolio team and those at other schools to which students may transfer.

- **student feedback-** Portfolios enable students to comment and reflect on their progress and to plan what they would do to improve.

### 4.9.7 Summary Sheet of Student Portfolio

**Reading** (Teacher)
- Teacher observation log
- Examples of what students can read
- Books/materials read
- Audio-tape of student's reading
- Test results, formal and informal
- Dialogue forms
- Examples of skills mastered

**Writing** (Teacher)
- First piece of writing each year
- Learning log, dialog journal January and May writing samples
- Drafts and final products from different genres (letters, poems, essays)
- Graphics (illustrations, diagrams)

**Reading** (Student)
- Favorite books/authors' list
- Genre graph, indicating type of literature preferred
- Journal entries
- List of completed books

**Writing** (Student)
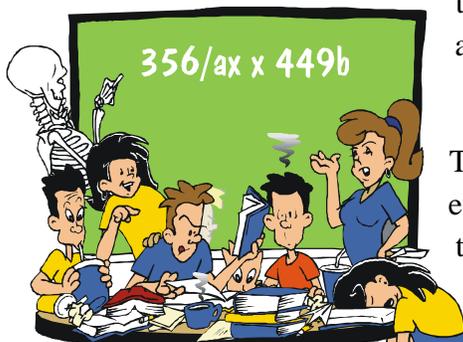- Writing sample and cover sheet
- List of completed pieces

| Evaluation | |
|---|---|
| ◼ Goals and/or self-evaluation ◼ Annual narrative summary by student | |
| **Optional Elements** | |
| ◼ Student self-assessment ◼ Reading journals ◼ Test results, formal and informal ◼ Reading comprehension tests | |

### 4.9.8 Grading

Report card grades are an important part of the communication among teachers and students. Grades have two basic purposes in the classroom: to reflect students' accomplishments and to motivate students. While grades may indicate the level or rank order of student performance, there are questions about their success in serving as an incentive for students to exert greater effort. Teachers often comment that not all students see grades as motivating.

Grades are extrinsic motivation not derived from self-determined criteria, as in learning out of interest and self-created goals. Moreover, people who are promised extrinsic rewards for an activity "tend to lose interest in whatever they had to do to obtain the reward". Grades can be a disincentive to some students, particularly when teachers grade on a curve; somebody always loses, and a portion of the class is made to feel inept.

The problems with assigning grades are even more evident with group grades. Group grades are typically an attempt to grade the final product of student teams that worked on a project, essay, or presentation.
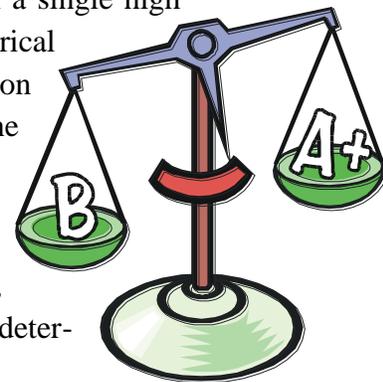
Group grades can undermine motivation because they do not reward individual work or hold individual students accountable. The poor performance of a single person can lower the group grade, thereby undermining the motivation of high-achieving students and rewarding low performers who are fortunate to have a high achiever on the team. In this sense, the group's grade is outside the control of the high-achieving student. Students need to know that they and other students are individually accountable for their work.

Surveys of grading practices indicate that teachers consider factors other than achievement or growth in determining grades, such as perceived level of effort, attitude, ability, behavior, and attendance. Two problems are evident in considering factors other than growth or achievement in assigning grades. First, the intermingling of achievement with other factors can have an unintended negative effect because students receive a mixed message on their accomplishments: "You tried hard but didn't succeed anyway." The second problem is in the extreme variation in grading from teacher to teacher. Teachers vary not only in the factors they use in grading, but also in the criteria they use to assign grades.

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**Among the methods teachers use in grading classroom tests are the following:**

- ℅ **Percentages** (90-100% = A, 80-90% = B, and so on)
- ℅ **Mastery** (80% = mastery, 60-79% = partial mastery, <60% = non-mastery)
- ℅ **Grading on a curve** (top 7% = A, next 24% = B, middle 38% = C, next 24% = D, and lowest 7% = F)
- ℅ **Gap grading** (assigning grades to suit large gaps in a score distribution, (94-100% = A, 90-93% no scores, 83-89% = B, 79-82% no scores, 68-78% = C, etc.)

---

In determining final grades from classroom tests, some teachers average numerical scores on these tests, while other teachers average the grades received on the tests. The latter approach reduces the impact on final grades from a single high or low test score. For example, an extremely low numerical score such as 3 out of 100 will have a far greater impact on the mean of all the tests than a single F will have on the mean of the corresponding grades.

Teachers can also assign different weights to tests, papers, presentations, and classroom participation in determining final grades.

In summary, not only does each teacher decide what will be evaluated and how much each activity will count, but teachers also determine how the final grade will be calculated. Because of this variation in grading practices and in criteria used to assign grades, we could expect a great deal of variation from teacher to teacher in the final grades students receive, even given a common set of papers or products to rate.
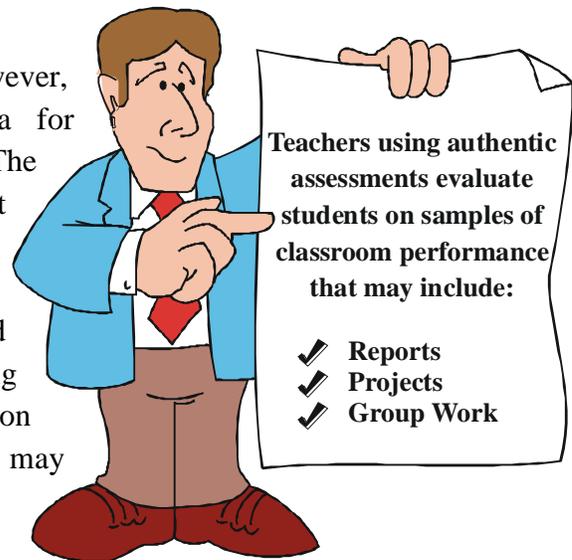
One final difficulty in grading practices stems more from the tests on which grades are based than from the grades themselves. In the past, classroom tests have tended to assess lower-level skills even when teachers claim to value and teach complex thinking. Inevitably, the resulting grades assigned will be based on lower-level skills instead of on the real objectives and content of classroom instruction.

**Grades can be useful if they are based on authentic assessments...**

Despite the problems we have identified with grading practices, our experience leads us to believe that grades can be useful if they are based on authentic assessments and are assigned following certain guidelines. Grades are requested regularly by students as a guide to their performance and are useful as an overall indicator of student achievement. When combined with illustrative samples of student work and with informative scoring, grades can provide a comprehensive picture of student growth and achievement.

Part of the usefulness of grades depends, however, on establishing relatively uniform criteria for grades in a school or among classrooms. The introduction of authentic assessment (including portfolios) to accompany more innovative forms of instruction expands considerably the alternatives that can be used to establish classroom grades. Teachers using authentic assessments evaluate students on samples of classroom performance that may include reports, projects, and/or group work.

**Teachers using authentic assessments evaluate students on samples of classroom performance that may include:**

✔ **Reports**
✔ **Projects**
✔ **Group Work**

In authentic assessment, student performance is often rated using scoring rubrics that define the knowledge students possess, how they think, and how they apply their knowledge.

Because the rubrics are specific, their use tends to reduce teacher-to-teacher variations in grading, especially if the teachers base their ratings on a common set of anchor papers. With the use of portfolios, teachers can provide specific examples of student work to illustrate the ratings they give to students on the scoring rubrics.

Furthermore, with authentic assessment, teachers often establish standards of performance that reflect what students should know or be able to do at different levels of performance that may also reflect different levels of mastery. Finally, teachers using authentic assessment share the criteria for scoring students' work openly and invite discussions of the criteria with students and parents.

> **Teachers using authentic assessment share the criteria for scoring students' work openly and invite discussions of the criteria with students and parents.**

With these new opportunities comes a challenge: to define the procedures by which scoring rubrics and rating scales are converted to classroom grades. In rating individual pieces of student work, one option is to directly convert rubrics on a 1-4 scale to corresponding letter grades. This could work acceptably provided that the points on the rubric represent what one considers to be an "A-level" performance, "B-level" performance, and so on.

While this may be effective in some cases, it is not always a good practice because definitions of what students know and can do at the different levels on the rubric do not always correspond to what is considered to be A or B performance. Thus, a second option is to establish independent standards of performance corresponding to letter grades. That is, identify in advance exactly what students receiving an A, B, etc. are expected to know and do in meeting the course objectives. Then obtain a student grade by comparing the student's actual performance with the established standard.

The standard corresponding to grades can reflect overall student performance across activities or projects, thereby avoiding the difficulty of having to create standards for grades on each student product. The score on a rubric for each activity provides effective informed feedback to students on their work, and the standard provides them with direction on what they need to accomplish.

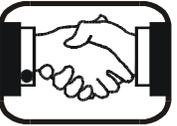**Our recommendations in grading and communicating student performance with authentic assessment are as follows:**

Assign scores to individual student achievement or growth based on a scoring rubric or an agreed-on standard to reflect mastery of classroom objectives.

Assign weights to different aspects of student performance as reflected in class assignments (e.g., projects, reports, and class participation).

Multiply each rating by the weight and sum the ratings of scores on individual papers or performances to obtain an overall numeric score.

Reach agreement with other teachers and your students on the interpretation of the summed score with respect to grades.

Do not assign grades for effort, and especially do not combine effort and achievement in a single grade.

If you assign grades for group work, assign separate grades for the group product and for individual contributions.

**In using anecdotal records to support grades:**
- Use the language of the rubric to help you write anecdotal comments, describing specifically what each student should know and be able to do.
- Link your comments to instructional goals, and (where appropriate) distinguish between language proficiency and content-area knowledge and skills.
- In expressing concerns, focus on what the student knows and can do, and your plan or strategies for helping the student improve.

Discuss growth over time in addition to current performance.
- Use anecdotal comments to provide feedback on group work and group participation.
- Use enclosures: a one-page class or course overview, samples of the student's work, the student's self-evaluation, etc.

Teachers should explore alternative forms of assessment and grading that are adapted to their instructional methods and to the scoring rubrics they use in evaluating student performance. In one such approach, a grade-level middle school teacher attempted to accomplish three goals: to establish a grading system that was consistent with an integrative (thematic) curriculum, to involve students in the design of classroom assessment and grading, and to avoid the stigma attached to grades of D and F by giving students opportunities to improve their work. She and a cooperating teacher agreed to assign only grades of A, B, C, or I (Incomplete), and graded only if the student turned in 80% of required work because anything less would be insufficient to grade.

Students were involved in the assessment of their own learning and also in the design of this system. Students selected five or six pieces from a portfolio to represent their "best work," wrote a self-evaluation of the quarter's work, and wrote goals for the next quarter. The teacher used all of this information in a quarterly conference with considerable success and a high degree of student participation.
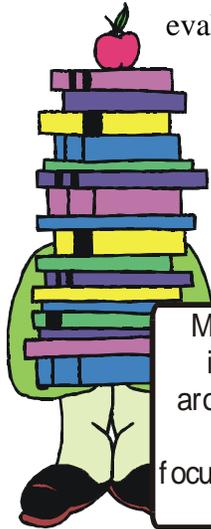
# 5. EVALUATION

| | |
|---|---|
| **Main Entry:** | e·val·u·a·tion |
| **Pronunciation:** | [i'vàllyoo'áysh'n] |
| **Function:** | noun |
| **Inflected Form(s):** | plural: e·val·u·a·tions |
| **Etymology:** | Latin *valere* |
| **First English use:** | Mid-18th century, from French "*évaluation*", from *évaluer* "*to find the value of*", from Latin *valere* "*value*". |

1. The act of considering or examining something in order to judge its <u>value</u>, quality, importance, extent, or condition.
2. A spoken or written statement of the <u>value</u>, quality, importance, extent, or condition of something.

## 5.1 Student Evaluation

Much research in education around the world is currently focusing on student evaluation. It has become clear, as more and more research findings accumulate, that a broader range of attributes needs to be assessed and evaluated than has been considered in the past. A wide variety of ways of doing this are suggested. Assessment and evaluation are best addressed from the viewpoint of selecting what appears most valid in allowing students to show what they have learned.
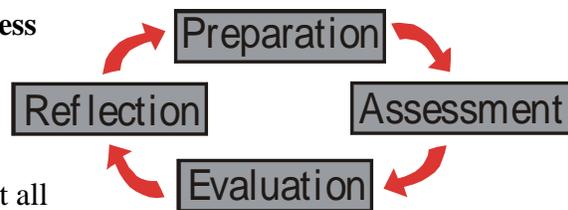
> Much research in education around the world is currently focusing on student evaluation.

Student evaluation focuses on the collection and interpretation of data, which would indicate student progress. This, in combination with **teacher self-appraisal, program evaluation**, and **curriculum evaluation** provides a full evaluation.

## 5.2 Phases of the Student Evaluation Process

Student evaluation can be viewed as a cyclical process including four phases: The student evaluation process involves the teacher as a decision-maker throughout all four phases.

Preparation → Assessment → Evaluation → Reflection →

**In the preparation phase,** decisions are made which identify what is to be evaluated, the type of evaluation (formative, summative, or diagnostic) to be used, the criteria against which student learning outcomes will be judged, and the most appropriate assessment strategies with which to gather information on student progress. Decisions made during this phase form the basis for planning during the remaining phases.

**During the assessment phase,** information-gathering strategies are identified, assessment instruments constructed or selected, administered to the students, and the information on student learning progress is collected. The identification and elimination of bias (such as gender and culture bias) from the information-gathering strategies and assessment instruments, and the determination of where, when, and how assessments will be conducted are important considerations.

**During the evaluation phase,** the information gathered during the assessment phase is used to make judgements about student progress. Based on the judgements (evaluations), decisions about student learning programs are made and reported to students, parents, and appropriate school personnel.
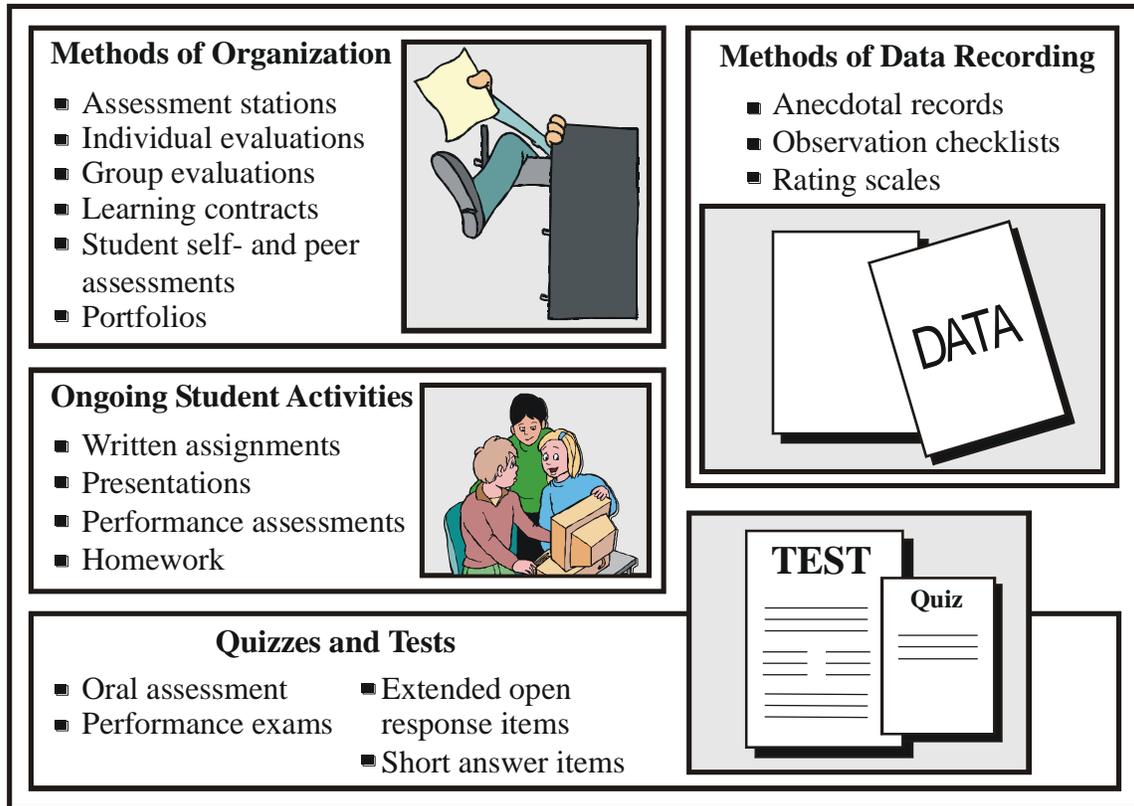
**The reflection phase** allows you to ponder the successes and shortfalls of the previous phases. Specifically, evaluate the utility and appropriateness of the assessment strategies used, and make decisions concerning improvements or modifications to subsequent teaching and assessment. You should contemplate questions that encourage reflection on student assessment, on your own planning, and on the structure of the curriculum.

**Note**: Formative, diagnostic, and summative evaluation processes should each involve all four phases.

### 5.3 Assessing Student Progress

Specific assessment techniques are selected in order to collect information about how well students are achieving objectives. Which assessment techniques are chosen depends on what the teacher wants the students to demonstrate, the capabilities of the students, and on what the students have been doing in class. The environment and culture of the students is also an important consideration.

Various assessment techniques are listed here for reference. Each teacher must exercise professional judgement in determining which techniques suit the particular purposes of the assessment. No two situations are identical, so, no two evaluation strategies should be identical.

**Methods of Organization**

- Assessment stations
- Individual evaluations
- Group evaluations
- Learning contracts
- Student self- and peer assessments
- Portfolios

**Methods of Data Recording**

- Anecdotal records
- Observation checklists
- Rating scales

DATA

**Ongoing Student Activities**

- Written assignments
- Presentations
- Performance assessments
- Homework

TEST

Quiz

**Quizzes and Tests**

- Oral assessment
- Performance exams
- Extended open response items
- Short answer items

## 5.4 Performance-Based Evaluation

In a curriculum based on activity, it is essential that performance testing be used for a significant portion of student assessment. Performance testing can also be used to gauge the effectiveness and value of particular activities. Skills and abilities that are stressed in the activities should be the ones that are included in the performance assessment.

Activity Book

Many activities described in activity books can be used as performance tests.

Performance testing should be used when it can test factors or criteria, which cannot be assessed as well using solely a paper and pencil item. They can be done as individual tests or as group tests.

Many activities described in activity books can be used as performance tests. If you pick one from an external source, make sure it relates to the objectives you have been stressing during instruction. A significant portion of the grade for middle level classes should be derived from performance-based evaluation.

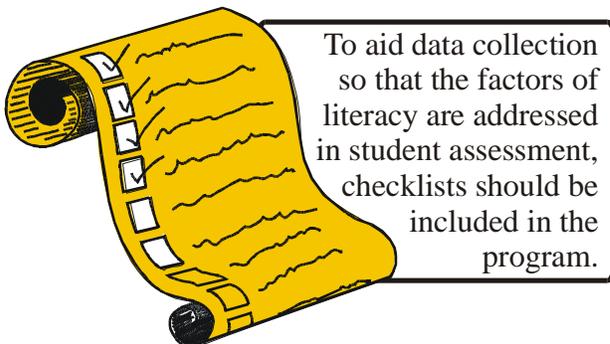**The following is an example of a performance task:**

The criteria for assessing the task are included in the student instructions for the task so that the students are aware of the basis for their evaluation.

The students should be given or develop these criteria at the beginning of a section of study, and told that these criteria would be used to help assess their performance at the end of the unit.

## 5.5  Record-Keeping

To aid data collection so that the factors of literacy are addressed in student assessment, checklists should be included in the program. Teachers should adapt these to suit their needs.

Teachers often differ in the way they like to collect data. Some prefer to have a single checklist, naming all the students in the class (or in one work group) across the top and listing the criteria to be assessed down the side. The students' columns are then marked if a criterion is met. In this case some information would have to be transferred later to a student's individual record.

> To aid data collection so that the factors of literacy are addressed in student assessment, checklists should be included in the program.

Other teachers prefer to have one assessment sheet per student, which forms part of the student's record. That sheet would list the factors for assessment down the side, but along the top might be a series of dates indicating when assessment took place.

Such an individual file would illustrate development over the year. In this case, information might have to be transferred from the record to the official class mark book, as required.

## 5.6  Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is a systematic process of gathering and analyzing information about some aspect of a school program in order to make a decision or to communicate with others involved in the decision-making process. Program evaluation can be conducted at two levels: informally at the classroom level, or more formally at the classroom, school, or school division levels.

At the classroom level, program evaluation is used to determine whether the program being presented to the students is meeting both their needs and individual objectives as well as the objectives prescribed by the educational authority.

Program evaluation is an ongoing process. For example, if a particular lesson appears to be poorly received by students, or if they do not seem to demonstrate the intended learning from a unit of study, the problem should be investigated and changes made.

**The information gathered through program evaluation can assist teachers in program planning and in making decisions for improvements.**

**INFORMATION**

By evaluating their programs at the classroom level, teachers become reflective practitioners. The information gathered through program evaluation can assist teachers in program planning and in making decisions for improvement.

Program evaluations at the classroom level are usually done informally but should be done systematically. Such evaluations should include identification of the areas of concern, collection and analysis of information, and judgement or decision-making.

Formal program evaluation projects use a step by step problem-solving approach to identify the purpose of the evaluation, draft a proposal, collect and analyze information, and report the evaluation results. The initiative to conduct a formal program evaluation may originate from an individual teacher, a group of teachers, the principal, a staff committee, an entire staff, or central office.

**Formal Program Evaluation Projects use a step by step problem-solving approach to:**
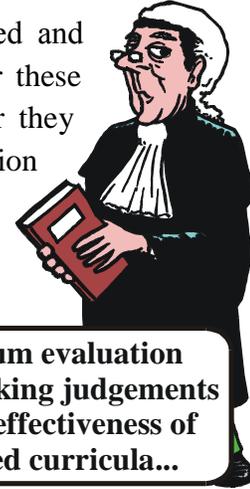
- **Identify purpose of the evaluation.**
- **Draft a proposal.**
- **Collect and analyze info.**
- **Report the evaluation results.**

Program evaluations are usually done by a team, so that a variety of background knowledge, experience, and skills are available and the work can be shared. Formal program evaluations should be undertaken regularly to ensure programs are current.

## 5.7  Curriculum Evaluation

During the decade of the 1990's, new curricula were developed and implemented. Consequently, there was a need to know whether these new curricula were being effectively implemented and whether they were meeting the needs of the students. Curriculum evaluation involves making judgements about the effectiveness of authorized curricula.

Curriculum evaluation involves the gathering of information (the assessment phase) and the making of judgements or decisions based on the information collected (the evaluation phase), to determine how well the curriculum is performing.

> **Curriculum evaluation involves making judgements about the effectiveness of authorized curricula...**
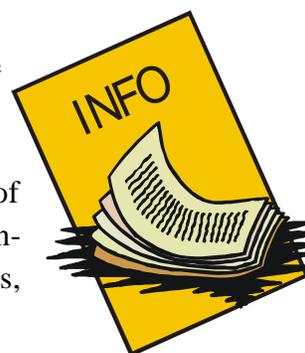
The principal reason for curriculum evaluation is to plan improvements to the curriculum. Such improvements might involve changes to the curriculum document and/or the provision of resources or in-service to teachers. Curriculum evaluation should be a shared, collaborative effort involving all of the major education partners in the province. Although the educational authority, i.e. the Ministry of Public Education, is responsible for conducting curriculum evaluations, various agencies and educational groups should be involved.
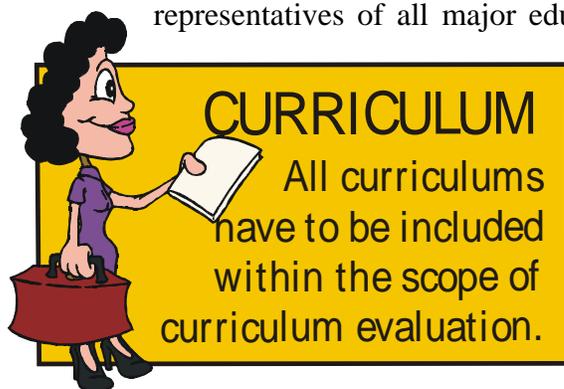
For instance, contractors may be hired to design assessment instruments; teachers will be involved in instrument development, validation, field testing, scoring, and data interpretation; and the cooperation of school divisions and school boards will be necessary for the successful execution of the curriculum evaluation.

In the assessment phase, information is gathered from students, teachers, and administrators. The information obtained from educators indicates the degree to which the curriculum is being implemented, the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum, and the problems encountered in teaching it.

The information from students indicates how well they are achieving the intended objectives and provides indications about their attitudes toward the curriculum. Student's information is gathered through the use of a variety of strategies including paper-and-pencil tests (objective and open-response), performance (hands-on) tests, interviews, surveys, and observation.

As part of the evaluation phase, assessment information is interpreted by representatives of all major education partners including the Curriculum Division of the Ministry of Public Education and classroom teachers. The information collected during the assessment phase is examined, and recommendations, generated by an interpretation panel, address areas in which improvements should be made.

CURRICULUM

All curriculums have to be included within the scope of curriculum evaluation.

These recommendations will be forwarded to the appropriate groups such as the Curriculum Division, school divisions and schools. All curriculums have to be included within the scope of curriculum evaluation. Evaluations will be conducted during the implementation phase for new curricula, and regularly on a rotating basis thereafter.

# 6. GIVING & RECEIVING FEEDBACK

## 6.1  Basic Principles of Feedback

**Giving Feedback**
- Describe behavior, make observations
- Be specific
- Share ideas and alternatives
- Be timely (as soon after the act as possible)
- Be careful of the amount of information given so that the person can hear what you are saying
- Focus on what is said, not motives for saying or doing it

**Receiving Feedback**
- Appreciate someone taking the time to talk with you
- Clarify your understanding of what is being said
- Remember: Once you receive feedback, decide appropriate response
- Don't become argumentative or defensive

## 6.2  It Will Never Be Easy, But It *Can* Be Better

*by Larry Porter*

We live in a world filled with feedback devices. Some are "coupled" – that is, the system *automatically* responds to feedback signals by making changes: A thermostat (*a device for measuring, controlling and maintaining a desired room temperature*) is one familiar example of this.



We live in a world filled with feedback devices.

However, many feedback devices merely provide us with information. It is then up to *us* to interpret that information and to decide how we want to use it.

"Uncoupled" feedback sources include such things as bathroom scales, fuel gauges, mirrors, tape recorders. Still others include ways in which people behave towards us – what they say and don't say, do and don't do, how they look, sound, etc.

These "uncoupled" indicators may be either unused or misused by us – particularly when our interpretations of the data are colored by our hopes, fears, needs, and desires.

When I'm driving, for example, I have a number of devices feeding back to me information about my car: its speed, engine temperature, oil pressure, fuel level. But I must interpret what that information "means" and make decisions as to what I want to do with it. I may, for example, note that the fuel gauge needle is low, but I choose to ignore it for a while; or I may convince myself that it's broken; or I may play a game with it, to see how far I can go before I heed the information and pull into a gas station. I am not likely to cover up the gauge because it threatens or offends me; nor am I likely to wrench the needle from the "E" to the "F" (thereby "magically" filling the tank!).

When I'm driving, I have a number of devices feeding back to me information about my car...

Similarly with a bathroom scale: If I think I'm not going to like what it tells me, I may not get on it at all. Or, if I'm dieting, I may weigh myself continuously and risk fretting myself out of any chance of staying with the diet. Or I may convince myself that it "weighs heavy". Mirrors? I can avoid them, except when I'm "feeling thin" or "nicely rounded". And I know full well, when I listen to myself on tape, that "it doesn't sound like me".

If I think I'm not going to like what it tells me, I may not get on it at all!!

This is true also with the feedback we get from people with whom we interact: we can play games with it, refuse to believe it, misinterpret it, etc. Most of us have at one time or another tried to cover up the "negative feedback" gauge, or to wrench the pointer from "Empty" to "Full", or we choose to ignore it.

Much of this behavior can be grouped under the general heading of "Defensiveness": denying, explaining, justifying, fighting, surrendering – everything but *dealing* with feedback as information that may have great value to us if we can let it in and effectively use it.

For reasons having mostly to do with our upbringing, we want to look "good" (better yet, "perfect!") to the world (no matter how much we may deny it), and in the interest of doing this we may try to shut out information that runs counter to that so-much-desired image. We fear information that "disconfirms" our "OKness".

This fear causes us to behave in ways that cut us off from feedback (either because it causes people to stop giving it to us or because it keeps us from being able to hear it), which is a pity, because game-free feedback can have great value. It's one of the major sources of information by which we can know how we're perceived by others, develop clarity about why our relationships are what they are (for good or bad), and decide what changes, if any, we want to make in our behavior so as to improve the quality of some relationships.

There's another problem, too. Not only are many of us afraid of feedback, but we lack skills related to sending and receiving it. Relatively few people have an opportunity to learn feedback skills. So we more or less automatically "do it the way it was done to us." And the way it was done to us is often what makes us fear it in the first place!

One way to break out of this cycle is to learn some feedback concepts. For example, what constitutes effective, i.e. helpful, non-game-playing feedback? And then, practice those concepts, either in a setting which validates such experimentation (such as a human relations laboratory) or with people back home with whom we can share the information and whom we can use as ongoing resources as we seek to improve our skills.

**Definition**

I'm defining *feedback* as information that flows between people that has to do with interaction in the here and now (more accurately, it is something *figural* (in the *Gestalt* sense) – that is, it is something *present* in their *attention* at the moment.).

Telling someone the time or that you'd rather go to a movie than to a baseball game is not feedback in the sense that I'm using the term. It's just *information*. I define *effective feedback* as information that:

1. Can be heard by the receiver (as evidenced by the fact that s/he does not get defensive, etc.);
2. Keeps the relationship intact, open, and healthy (though not devoid of conflict or pain);
3. Validates the feedback process in future interactions (rather than avoiding it because "last time it hurt so much").

Further more, feedback does not assume that the giver is totally right and the receiver wrong; instead, it is an invitation to interaction; it has some give-and-take to it. Also, it is a behavior that is inappropriate in interactions with people who do not have some significance in our lives, but all right in interactions that we know or want to have duration and importance.

**Criteria for Effective Feedback**

Following are 13 criteria for effective feedback and ineffective feedback. If this sounds intimidating, keep in mind that some of them are easy to start using once you are aware of them. In addition, you probably won't need to concern yourself with all of them and may find yourself focusing on a cluster of four or five, which you realize (or are helped to realize) are problems for you. Also, I'm providing the "flip-side" of each criterion – things we do which are not effective and which often trap us into games and other related confusions. It may be that if you can just *stop doing some of those* you'll have made significant progress, even though you don't consciously try to do the ones that are listed as effective.

To repeat, that's a lot to keep track of, especially given the fact that most of us have had extensive training in how *not* to give feedback. Here are some suggestions you may find helpful:
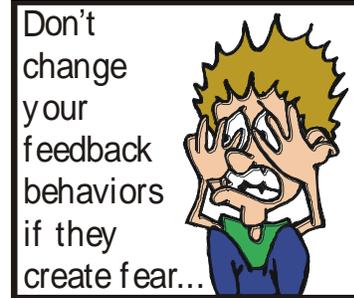
1. Find out which ineffective feedback behavior you most want to get rid of. You can do this by paying careful attention to what you do in significant interactions. Work on those and try to *stop* doing the ineffective things.
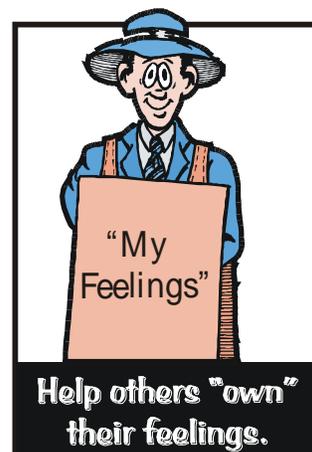
2. Don't expect miracles. Disconfirming feedback almost always carries some sting, no matter how skillfully given; and some people are more easily stung than others. Relationships marked by a relatively high degree of open, competent feedback are likely to be richer, more complex, more interesting than those marked by little feedback or game playing. They are, however, also likely to be more prickly and intense, and they require more time and energy, at times, than those relationships in which "disconfirmations" are withheld or masked.

**3.** If for one reason or another (fear of punishment, risk of losing a relationship you're not ready to lose, lack of confidence in your skills, etc.) you think you don't want to try to be more open and use more effective feedback behavior, then *don't*. But pay attention to the choice you are making - there may be some important learning in it for you. Or you may want to test out some feedback in very small increments, to see what happens.



Don't change your feedback behaviors if they create fear...

**4.** The 13 criteria are useful to you as a *receiver* of feedback as well as a giver. You may decide that you can't/won't give much feedback to another in a given relationship. OK! But do try to use what you've learned as a means of "managing" feedback you receive. If someone tells you you're being obnoxious, you may elect to feel hurt or angry, or you choose to be *serious* (in *addition* to being hurt and angry!) and ask for descriptive information: "What am I doing that causes you to say that?"
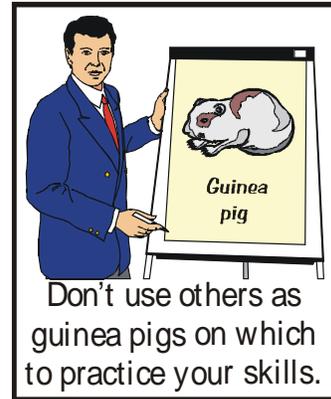


"My Feelings"

Help others "own" their feelings.

You can also try to help others "own" their feelings, rather than allowing them to shuffle them off onto others ("People are talking…"). You can help the sender explore his or her feelings (active listening is useful) or clarify for you (and perhaps himself or herself) the *consequences* of the behavior being discussed.
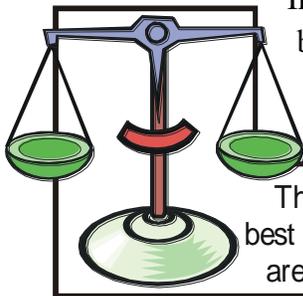
In short, if you know something about effective feedback skills (and if you can avoid getting into a defensive posture), you may be able to be helpful to the person giving you feedback, so that the two of you are *problem solving* rather than attacking/defending. This will help you, too, in that it will either get you much clearer feedback, or it will indicate what "game" the sender is playing.

**5.** Don't become a feedback addict. Sometimes people get excited about *new learning* (newly acquired information) and use it all the time and in every place. This can wear thin very quickly. Not every event needs to be worked through.

Not every utterance has to be perfect. Remember to allow for some slippage in your relationships. Take small risks, be willing to "approximate" and see what happens. Above all, don't use others as guinea pigs on which to practice your skills.



**Guinea pig**

Don't use others as guinea pigs on which to practice your skills.

**6.** The feedback process works best when it involves people who are - at least in that interaction - equals. If one person is "up" (dominant, right, faultless, containing all virtue) and the other is "down" (passive, wrong, the culprit or villain of the piece), it is likely to turn into one of a number of games, as the "down" person attempts (usually without realizing it) to equalize the power between them, to gain what might be called psychological parity.



The feedback process works best when it involves people who are equal (in that interaction).

If you can recognize that what began as a feedback interaction between equals has moved to behavior ("helpless me", "awful me", "you're one, too", "but you don't understand") that might be termed "attack/defense", you may be able to alter the interaction's direction by having both you and the other person look at what's happening. Note well: both *you* and the other person. For as long as the burden is on the "down" person, the "up" person is maintaining or increasing her/his "upness" and promoting an escalation of the power equalization efforts.

By now you may be muttering, "But it's so complicated, and it sounds like a lot of work, and it also sounds risky." Yes! And the same can be said of many of the things that are important to us. It is, I believe, a matter of *values*. If I value clear, open relationships, if I value the others with whom I share those relationships, and if I value *myself* in those relationships, then I may find that I have no choice but to do the hard work, take the risks, suffer the losses, and be enriched by the gains.

## EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE FEEDBACK BEHAVIOR

| **Effective Feedback** | **Ineffective Feedback** |
|---|---|
| 1. Describes the behavior, which leads to the feedback: "You are finishing my sentences for me…" | ▪ Uses evaluative/judgmental statements: "You're being rude." |
| 2. Comes as soon as appropriate after the behavior - immediately if possible, later if events make it necessary (something important is going on, you need time to "cool down", the person deals with other feedback, etc.) | ▪ Is delayed, saved up, and "dumped". Also known as "gunny-sacking" or ambushing. The more time passes, the "safer" it is to give feedback. Induces guilt and anger in the receiver, because after time has passed, there's not much one can do about it. |
| 3. Is direct, from sender to receiver. | ▪ Is ricocheted from a third person. |
| 4. Is "owned" by the sender, who uses "messages" and takes responsibility for his or her thoughts, feelings, reactions, etc. | ▪ "Shows ownership" and is transferred to "people", "the book", "upper management", etc. |
| 5. Includes the sender's real feelings about the behavior, insofar as they are relevant to the feedback: "I get frustrated when I'm trying to make a point, and you keep finishing my sentences." | ▪ Suggests that feelings are concealed, denied, misre-presented, distorted. One way to do this is to smuggle the feelings into the inter-action by being sarcastic, sulking, com-peting to see who's "right". |
| 6. Is checked for clarity to ensure that the receiver fully understands what is being conveyed. "Do you understand what I mean when I say you seem to be sending me a double message?" | ▪ Is not checked – sender assumes clarity or is *not interested* in whether the receiver understands fully: "Stop interrupting me with 'Yes, but…'!" |
| 7. Asks relevant questions which seek information (has a problem solving quality), with the receiver knowing why the information is sought and having a clear sense that the sender doesn't know the answer. | ▪ Asks questions, which are really state-ments ("Do you think I'm going to let you get away with this?") or sound like traps ("How many times have you been late this week?"). "Experts" at this game easily combine the two: "How do you think that makes me feel?" |
| 8. Specifies consequences of behavior – present and/or future: "When you finish my sentences, I get frustrated and want to stop talking with you." "If you keep finishing my sentences, I won't want to spend much time talking with you in the future." | ▪ Provides vague consequences: "That kind of behavior will get you into trouble." Or it specifies no consequences and substitutes instead other kinds of leverage, such as "should" ("You shouldn't do that.") |
| 9. Is solicited or at least to some extent desired by the receiver. | ▪ Is imposed on the receiver, often for his or her "own good". |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **10.** | Refers to behavior about which the receiver can do something: "I wish you would stop interrupting me." | ▪ Refers to behavior over which the receiver has little or no control: "I wish you'd laugh at my jokes." |
| **11.** | Takes into account the needs of both sender and receiver, and recognizes that this is a "process", an interaction in which, at any moment, the sender can become the receiver.  Sender: "I'm getting frustrated by the fact that often you're not ready to leave when I am." Receiver: "I know that's a problem, but I'm concerned about what seems to be your need to have me always do what you want when you want." | ▪ Is distorted by the sender to *be safe* ("I don't want to get angry, but…") to *punish* ("Can't you do *anything* right?"), to *win* ("You admit that you *do* interrupt me!") or to be *virtuous* ("I'm going to be open with you…").  In short, most ineffective feedback behavior comes either from a lack of skills or from the sender not seeing the process as an interaction in which both parties have needs that must be taken into account. |
| **12.** | Affirms the receiver's existence and worth by acknowledging his or her "right" to have the reactions he or she has, whatever they may be, and by being willing to work through issues in a game-free way. | ▪ Denies or discounts the receiver by using statistics, abstractions, averages by refusing to accept his/her feelings: "You're just being paranoid." "Come on, you're over-reacting!" |
| **13.** | Acknowledges and, where necessary, makes use of the fact that a process is going on that needs to be monitored and sometimes explored and improved: "I'm getting the impression that we're not listening to each other. I'd like to talk about that." | ▪ Either does not value the concept of "process" or does not want to take time to discuss anything other than content.Consequently, it doesn't pay attention to the process, which can result in confusion, wasted time and energy, and lots of ineffective feedback. |