

# FOR PARENTS

## Frequently Asked Questions: PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS

*Performance assessments have recently gained popularity as a way for teachers, school and district administrators, and others to understand what students know and can do. These types of assessments allow teachers to modify instruction based on student performance. They are also used to hold districts and schools accountable for demonstrating gains in student achievement. This FAQ is intended to provide some basic information about what these types of assessments are and how they might be used.*

### What exactly are performance assessments?

Performance assessments are assessments that require a student to perform or create a product, such as an essay or drawing, as a way of demonstrating their knowledge and skills. The type of performance required of students depends on what we are trying to find out about students' knowledge and skills. For example:

- If we are trying to find out how well students can develop a reasoned argument, the performance assessment might require them to write a persuasive essay.
- If we are interested in how well students can read music, the performance assessment would likely require them to demonstrate those skills by singing or playing a song.

These approaches allow the teachers to observe and evaluate specific qualities of the student's performance or product.

### What is the difference between performance assessments, performance-based assessment, and performance tasks?

There are many terms that people use to describe these types of assessments. "Performance assessment" and "performance-based assessment" mean the same thing and actually refer to an array of assessment approaches, of which a performance task is only one example.



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Performance tasks have specific features that make them unique from other types of performance assessments, such as demonstrations. For example, performance tasks usually provide students with reading materials, graphs, charts, or other information and ask students to process this information and use it to respond to several activities that are related by a common theme or topic. Demonstrations, on the other hand, require students to engage in a live performance of some skill, such as playing a musical instrument or driving a car.

Pearson has identified 7 approaches to performance assessments. To learn more about these specific types of approaches, read our interactive guide at <http://performanceassessmentframework.pearsonassessments.com>.

## How & where do performance assessments fit in the curriculum?

Performance assessment can be considered as any one of the types of assessment in a balance assessment system. That is, they can be embedded in the curriculum as part of a formative observation of student performance. They may also be included as part of or as a benchmark or interim assessment following the end of an instructional cycle. Or, as we've seen in PARCC and Smarter Balanced, they can be included as part of large-scale summative assessments.

## How are performance assessments scored?

Performance assessments are usually not scored as correct or incorrect. Rather, they are scored by comparing the performance to a set of criteria, which describe the characteristics of an outstanding, good, acceptable, and unacceptable performance. These may be scored by teachers, professional scorers, or even computers, depending on the type of assessment and its purpose.

## Do kids still have to take other tests?

Other types of assessments may be used in conjunction with performance assessments or performance assessments may stand alone. There are several considerations to that decision, including what is it that you intend to measure and what claims do you want to make about what students know and can do, what is the evidence of student performance that would support those claims, and what is the item or assessment design required to illicit the student evidence. Other considerations include the amount of time deemed appropriate for the assessment, how it will be scored, and the type of information you want to provide to teachers, students and parents.

## Why am I hearing more about performance assessments or performance tasks now?

Perhaps the biggest reason is that states and the federal government are calling on schools to do a better job of preparing students to succeed in college and in skilled career training programs after high school. In 2006, a group of governors and state education leaders recognized that most high school graduates were not ready for college. They banded together to develop what are called the Common Core State Standards for mathematics and English language arts. Forty-two states are now working to incorporate those standards into lessons and



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instruction. The new standards stress that students not only need to gain knowledge and acquire skills, they also need to be able to use what they've learned to solve complex, unfamiliar problems in creative ways.

To assess these skills, there are new assessment programs. The [Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Career](#) and the [Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium](#) are two multi-state consortia currently creating assessments that include performance tasks. Other assessment programs, such as alternate assessments for students with disabilities, also require performance assessments.

This trickles down into the classroom as teachers begin to teach this rigorous, new set of standards and prepare students for the accompanying assessments. Use of performance assessments as tools for gauging student progress is nothing new. Teachers have been assigning essays to evaluate student writing for generations. However, performance assessment is garnering more visibility lately as these approaches become part of high-profile assessment programs.

## How can I help my child or student prepare for these types of assessments?

Parents can help students prepare for performance assessments by explaining that what students produce may not always be scored as right or wrong but based on a range of correctness or completeness. Therefore, students should focus on the processes used to generate responses and the quality of responses to performance assessments. For example, for math problems, ask your child how he/she got the answer, why the approach was used, and what other ways might be used to solve the problem. When your child is constructing a persuasive essay, discuss how he/she generated the opinion, what counter arguments were considered, and how ideas are supported with evidence from text. Discussing these types of assessments with your child's teacher may also help you understand what the expectations are for students at their level.

To learn more about performance assessments, explore the Framework of Approaches to Performance Assessment at <http://performanceassessmentframework.pearsonassessments.com>.