FRAMEWORK OF APPROACHES TO PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Executive Summary

ASSESSMENTS FOR A CHANGING EDUCATION LANDSCAPE: PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

A competitive global economy demands employees who can think critically and creatively, use evidence to support their solutions to complex problems, and communicate clearly. To prepare students, many states have adopted the Common Core State Standards, which set rigorous expectations for students and create the foundation for college and career.

However, how do we know our students are on track for postsecondary success? While conventional multiple-choice items are useful for finding out what students know about a subject, performance assessment is better suited for providing direct evidence of these other types of more complex skills that students will need to be creative and collaborative problem solvers in the workforce. As the name suggests, performance assessment requires students to actually perform—write, construct, or create—to provide evidence of their knowledge, skills, and abilities in a particular area.

Performance assessments can be used periodically during the school year by teachers to gather information about their classroom's skills and progress. If administered at the end of the year, performance assessments can provide information to a school district and state about how much students are learning.

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With new expectations for students to demonstrate these more complex skills, states are demanding performance-based assessment. Despite the recent resurgence of these types of assessments a great deal of confusion exists, even among educators and assessment experts, as to what is or is not a performance assessment, as well as the different forms performance assessment can take. Researchers, test publishers, educators, and policy-makers variously refer to performance assessment as tasks, events, activities, demonstrations, or exhibitions. Experts in learning sciences and educational measurement from Pearson's Center for NextGen Learning & Assessment clarified these issues in a guide to performance assessment.

Based on a wide range of research, the guide

- defines performance assessment
- discusses the distinguishing features of seven different approaches
- suggests potential purposes of each
- identifies real examples in education as well as in other fields
- discusses design and scoring considerations that may affect decisions about which approach is best to use in a given situation.
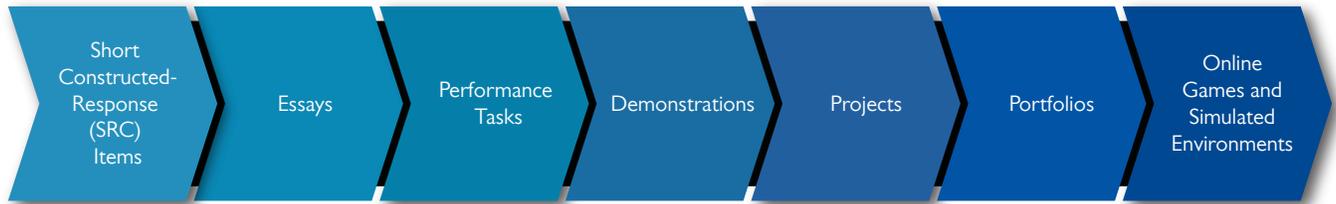
DEFINITION OF PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

A performance assessment is an activity or set of activities that requires examinees to generate products or performances that provide direct or indirect evidence of their knowledge, skills, and abilities in an academic subject or a profession.

Typically, performance assessments simulate real-world conditions of the performance by requiring examinees to demonstrate the skills in much the same way that the skills would be used in college or on the job. They require examinees to use complex knowledge, skills, and/or reasoning. Performances are evaluated against a set of criteria that describe levels of quality, correctness, and completeness.

SEVEN APPROACHES TO PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

Short Constructed-Response (SRC) Items	Essays	Performance Tasks	Demonstrations	Projects	Portfolios	Online Games and Simulated Environments

The Center's guide explores seven different approaches to performance assessment and describes how they are similar to one another, how they're different, and how they are best used. The approaches include:

1. Short-constructed response items, which require test-takers to write brief responses that capture their knowledge and thinking processes, create graphical representations of concepts, or manipulate objects or text in certain ways to communicate their understanding.

2. Essays, which require test-takers to create an extended written response to a specific prompt for a particular purpose, such as to describe, entertain, persuade, or explain.

3. Performance tasks, which require test-takers to analyze a collection of materials, which could include a scenario, reading passages, graphs, charts, images or audio or video files, and respond to a series of related activities.

4. Demonstrations, which give students a chance to physically show what they know and can do and may include driving tests, playing a musical instrument, or repairing an engine .

5. Projects, which require more extended and student-directed investigations of a given problem, and may include term papers, science fair projects, honors theses, and group research presentations.

6. Portfolios, which are collection of a student or job candidate's work that illustrates either current knowledge, skills and abilities within a domain, such as art or architecture, or growth in those capabilities over time.

7. Online games and simulated environments, which are just beginning to be used for assessment rather than entertainment purposes. This approach requires examinees to delve deeply into a richly-simulated digital environment, interact with peers or avatars and manipulate objects to obtain information, infer goals and rules, plan, track their own progress, persist, and solve problems or make decisions.

THE FUTURE

The importance of performance assessment in education is going to grow due to labor market demands. Fortunately, the spread of digital technologies that can simulate realistically a variety of situations will soon make it possible to seamlessly combine instruction and assessment so that it becomes almost unnoticeable to the test takers. This framework is designed to serve as a roadmap for the transition to next generation assessments.

for more information

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