

Assessment Practices We Believe In

Helping students make progress depends on having a clear understanding of where they currently are. Rick Stiggins, Judith Arter, Jan Chappuis, and Stephen Chappuis (2004) argue that the real trick to assessing learning is choosing the right measures for the job. To focus your learning team, master the following three strategies recommended by Stiggins et al. (2004) in *Classroom Assessment for Student Learning*.

Strategy One: Selected-Response Questions	
<p>Chances are, you've written a thousand selected-response questions (true/false, yes/no, multiple choice, matching) during the course of your career, but have you ever thought carefully about why selected-response questions make sense? We use selected-response questions here at our school to measure mastery of the discrete bits of content knowledge that students must know before they can wrestle with the more significant concepts and skills in a curricula.</p>	
<i>Advantages of Selected-Response Questions</i>	<i>Reminders About Selected-Response Questions</i>
<p>Selected-response questions can be developed, taken, and graded quickly, making team-centered assessments manageable.</p> <p>Multiple questions about the same concept can be asked in an assessment, providing protection against bad questions or inaccurate conclusions.</p>	<p>Selected-response questions are only effective at measuring mastery of stand-alone bits of knowledge-based content.</p> <p>The vocabulary used in each question must be (1) carefully polished and clear and (2) introduced to students during the course of classroom instruction.</p>
Strategy Two: Extended-Response Questions	
<p>Extended-response questions are exactly what you think they are: prompts that require students to wrestle with their own thinking in a paragraph-length response to a question. We use extended-response questions here at our school to assess just how well students understand the connections between the discrete bits of content that they are studying.</p>	
<i>Advantages of Extended-Response Questions</i>	<i>Reminders About Extended-Response Questions</i>
<p>Extended-response questions are perfect for measuring mastery of higher-order thinking skills like identifying cause-and-effect relationships or making comparisons—common reasoning patterns in every curricular area.</p> <p>Extended-response questions can be developed and administered easily to every student during the course of one instructional period. They don't require long periods of teacher or student time in order to collect evidence of learning.</p>	<p>Teams will need to develop a series of exemplars of high-, medium-, and low-level student responses to help standardize grading practices across classrooms.</p> <p>In order to measure higher-order thinking skills, extended-response questions must force students to think about new situations, instead of working with content or questions they have already explored during classroom instruction.</p>

Strategy Three: Performance Assessments

Performance assessments—tangible observations of students in action—have received a lot of positive attention in the education press since 2000 from experts passionate about creating authentic learning experiences for students. We use performance assessments here at our school to assess mastery of essential skills that can be observed.

Advantages of Performance Assessments

Unlike selected- and extended-response questions, which measure what students know, performance assessments allow teams to measure what students can actually do.

They are essential when studying the kinds of skills—solving multistep equations, developing testable hypotheses, engaging in collaborative conversations—necessary for success in any subject.

Reminders About Performance Assessments

Performance assessments are time consuming to administer and assess. Remember to create space within your instructional calendar to make them possible and to create meaningful independent learning activities for students not being observed.

Performance assessments are not the best strategy for measuring every learning outcome. Don't feel pressured to use them more than is really necessary.

Source: Stiggins et al., 2004.