

Performance Assessment

SUSAN M. BROOKHART

What Is Performance Assessment?

In performance assessment, students perform a task that requires they demonstrate a process, create a product or both. The performance is evaluated by observation and judgment based on established criteria, typically organised into a rubric. Both the task and the rubric are part of the performance assessment. A task without a rubric is just an activity – something students do without a measuring stick to indicate quality. A rubric without a task is just a guide for thinking – criteria to consider without a specific performance to apply them to.

Why Use Performance Assessment?

Performance assessment is useful whenever you need to know what students can do as well as what they know. Performance assessment helps students connect their knowledge with the kinds of problems they may have to solve in the real world. In fact, behind most learning standards, even those that seem completely didactic, stands the assumption that students are learning facts and concepts because they are useful for something. Performance assessment takes the next step, gauging how well students can use their knowledge.

Well-designed assessment carries many benefits (like tests, performance assessments can be well or poorly designed and poorly designed assessment benefits no one).

- The performance task and criteria can help students conceptualise what their knowledge and skills should look like. The first step in student self-regulation of learning is to actually understand what it is that one is trying to learn.
- Performance assessment is active – students have to do, make, say or write something. Active engagement with a task helps students engage with their learning.
- Performance assessment is an appropriate vehicle for assessment of complex standards. For example, many next-generation standards talk about disciplinary practices as well as mastery of facts and concepts.
- A performance assessment allows students to show how they can apply their knowledge to solve problems in a discipline.
- The rubrics for evaluating performance on a task are a summary of what good work looks like. Understanding criteria for success is part of a student's understanding of the learning goal itself. Both teachers and students can use rubrics to monitor learning and provide feedback so that a final mark is not a surprise or a "gotcha".

What kinds of learning outcomes are well suited to performance assessment?

Knowledge can be divided into three types:

Factual & Conceptual	Factual and conceptual knowledge are sometimes called <i>declarative knowledge</i> . Declarative knowledge is usually well assessed with a well-designed test. However, if you want to know if students can <i>use</i> their knowledge of facts and concepts to solve problems, a performance assessment may be more appropriate. Performance assessment can address how students conceptualise and solve a wide variety of both academic and practical problems with facts and concepts they have learned and thinking and reasoning skills as well.
Procedural	Procedural knowledge is knowledge of how to do something. Some procedural knowledge can be well assessed with a test – knowledge, for example, of when to apply a certain law in physics. Performance assessment can address procedural knowledge as well. For example, a performance task might ask students to use knowledge of various laws of physics to design or construct a model vehicle and students would be assessed on the quality of their application of physics laws as well as the success of their design.
Metacognitive	Metacognitive knowledge refers to students' awareness and understanding of their own thought processes. Performance assessment tasks that include opportunities for planning, monitoring and reflecting on one's work help assess metacognition.