

PLANNING & DESIGNING ASSESSMENT

Assessment is not simply a process of checking what learners have learnt but rather a powerful means of directing teaching and improving learning in the classroom. In planning a learning topic or unit, the teacher needs to integrate their assessment strategy with their teaching or lesson plan to maximise the development of understanding in their learners.

ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES

1. Test – Selected-Response

A test is a formal assessment usually performed by a learner as a pen & paper activity although it may be administered orally or via new technology clicker systems. Tests may be of two different types: selected-response or constructed-response.

Selected-response tests are often referred to as objective tests. This is not true. Despite the fact that they have a correct and an incorrect answer and are impartially scored, the wording of the questions and optional answers may reflect the subjectivity of the writer/creator.

Selected-response tests can be composed of:

- Multiple-choice Items
- Matching Items
- True or False Items

Multiple-choice Test Items

A multiple-choice item consists of three parts:

- a stem (a question or a statement);
- a key (the correct option or answer) and
- several distracters (incorrect options or answers).

Each item should be short, clear, verbally uncomplicated and test a single idea.

Some guidelines –

- ensure that the stem is worded positively – if this cannot be avoided, capitalise and underline the negative word e.g. which of the following is NOT a cause of ...
- test only one idea in each item
- use 3 to 5 options arranged vertically below the stem
- all options should be plausible and homogeneous
- all options should be of similar length and use similar grammatical form
- all options should be ordered logically (alphabetically or numerically)

- avoid “All of the Above” or “None of the above” options
- avoid any repeating pattern of correct answers (e.g. always a “c” option)
- avoid verbal clues and specific determiners e.g. “a”, “an”, “the”
- include common errors and misconceptions in the distracter options
- ensure that the items are not interdependent – avoid information in one item providing the answer to another

Matching Test Items

This consists of two lists of words, phrases or images called stems and responses. Learners review the stem list and match each stem with the correct word, phrase or image from the response list.

Some guidelines –

- generally, stems should contain more words in the phrases than the responses
- there should be more options in the response list than in the stem list
- all responses should be plausible and homogeneous
- all responses should be of similar length to each other and grammatically similar
- all responses should be logically ordered
- avoid verbal clues and specific determiners e.g. “a”, “an”, “the”

True or False Test Items

These items are usually a declarative statement which learners must judge as “true” or “false”. As these items have only two optional answers, they are less reliable than other selected-response items due to the high possibility of guessing. These items may seem quicker to prepare but more care must be taken with the accuracy of the wording to prevent any ambiguities.

Some guidelines –

- statements must be completely true or completely false
- statements must be clear and simple and relatively short
- include similar numbers of true and false statements
- avoid negatives and double negatives
- avoid absolutes like “always” and “never”

Generally, a Selected-Response Test used with a Marking Memorandum is favoured when assessing Knowledge & Simple Understanding Learning Targets.

2. Test – Constructed-Response

A test is a formal assessment usually performed by a learner as a pen & paper activity although it may be administered orally or via new technology clicker systems. Tests may be of two different types: selected-response or constructed-response.

The simplest Constructed-Response Test Items are **Fill-in-the-Blank items**. These usually take the form of an incomplete statement and the learner is required to fill in a missing word or phrase. These items need to be carefully worded to avoid ambiguity. They have limited use as they tend to test only Knowledge & Simple Understanding Learning Targets like most Selected-Response test items.

Short Constructed-Response items are defined as those which are designed to take about 5 minutes to answer and require approximately 8 lines of writing to respond. These provide more opportunity for the learner to demonstrate their understanding but still tend to focus on lower-order thinking.

Extended Constructed-Response items are a little more advanced and involve learners writing paragraphs which may take 10 to 15 minutes.

Essay Question items are the most complex and provide the learner with the most freedom to respond. However these items must be very well-designed so that the learner understands exactly what is expected of them. A well-written essay question should specify clearly how the learner should respond, indicate the value and weight of the question and how it will be scored and emphasise higher-order thinking.

Constructed-Response items are more difficult to mark as they require assessment tools like an open-ended Marking Memoranda or rubrics but they provide greater opportunities to assess Reasoning & Deep Understanding Learning Targets.

3. Observation

Teacher observation is one of the most effective assessment techniques because the teacher collects data while the learner engages in the learning activity. With experience, teachers develop keen visual, auditory and other perceptual skills to identify a learner's academic abilities, skills, strengths, weaknesses, needs, behaviours, social interactions, health, emotions, attitudes, values and motivation.

Observation is mostly used as an informal assessment technique but with formal recording via Observation Record Sheets, it is a valuable assessment technique for the teacher. It has also mainly been used with younger learners but has potential to assist teachers of older learners particularly in assessing the Affective Learning Targets.

There are a number of different types of observation techniques.

- **Target Child Observation**

This involves focusing a particular child and collecting observable data for later analysis. It usually has a specific purpose to assess a new or "problem" child.

- **Sampling Observation**

Observations are made over a given period of time (time-sampling) for all learners or particular behaviours or events (event-sampling) are recorded for an individual learner or a group of learners. It focuses on the presence or frequency of a particular behaviour and generally also has a very specific purpose.

- **Narrative Observation**

This is the most popular, oldest, and most informative method to record observation of learners. It describes what happens, how, where and when it happened in a factual objective manner. It is important for the observer to: record only the facts; record every detail without omitting anything; not interpret what is observed; not record anything not seen; use words that describe and not judge or interpret; and record facts in order. Observations can highlight: learners' interests and preferences; levels of cognitive and social development; skills and accomplishments; personalities and temperaments.

Feedback from learner observation can be extremely valuable to the teacher in designing and adjusting their assessment strategies particularly those being used formatively as well as maintaining a positive learning environment in their classroom.

4. Dialogue

Oral questioning is one of the most frequently used classroom practices and is an essential component of effective teaching. Individual questioning of a learner creates the framework of teacher-learner dialogue and is an opportunity for the teacher to understand the thinking processes of the learner. It is a valuable technique for revealing the depth of learner knowledge but as a one-on-one activity, it is time-consuming. Details can be recorded on Anecdotal Record Sheets.

5. Performance Task

A performance task usually required an audience to be present to watch the learner. Examples of performance tasks are oral presentations, demonstrations, enactments, debates, panel discussions, audio clips, videos and computer presentations. Performance tasks are well-matched to assessing Skill learning targets. Assessment Tools like rubrics – holistic and analytical; and performance lists are well-suited to assessing performance tasks.

6. Created Product

Products are samples of learner's work that demonstrate their ability to use their knowledge and understanding to create a tangible object. Products could be artworks, papers, reports, essays, posters, projects, portfolios, models and videos. Created products exist independently of the learner's performance as the producer and provide concrete evidence of the learner's proficiency. Assessment tools like rubrics – holistic and analytical; performance lists, rating scales and checklists are well-suited to assessing created products.