

Authentic Assessment Overview

Page 1 of 2

How well do multiple-choice tests really evaluate student understanding and achievement? Many educators believe that there is a more effective assessment alternative. These teachers use testing strategies that do not focus entirely on recalling facts. Instead, they ask students to demonstrate skills and concepts they have learned. This strategy is called *authentic assessment*.

What is authentic assessment?

Authentic assessment aims to evaluate students' abilities in 'real-world' contexts. In other words, students learn how to apply their skills to authentic tasks and projects. Authentic assessment does not encourage rote learning and passive test-taking. Instead, it focuses on students' analytical skills; ability to integrate what they learn; creativity; ability to work collaboratively; and written and oral expression skills. It values the learning process as much as the finished product.

How can you encourage students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world tasks?

In authentic assessment, students:

- do science experiments
- conduct social-science research
- write stories and reports
- read and interpret literature
- solve math problems that have real-world applications

Why might I use authentic assessment methods in my classroom?

Many teachers are dissatisfied with only using traditional testing methods. They believe these methods do not test many skills and abilities students need to be successful. These educators assert that students must be prepared to do more than memorize information and use algorithms to solve simple problems. They believe students should practice higher-order thinking skills, and criticize tests they feel do not measure these skills.

Authentic Assessment Overview

Page 2 of 2

How can I use authentic assessment in my classroom?

Authentic assessment utilizes *performance samples* – learning activities that encourage students to use higher-order thinking skills. There are five major types of performance samples:

1. Performance Assessment

Performance assessments test students' ability to use skills in a variety of authentic contexts. They frequently require students to work collaboratively and to apply skills and concepts to solve complex problems. Short- and long-term tasks include such activities as:

- writing, revising, and presenting a report to the class
- conducting a week-long science experiment and analyzing the results
- working with a team to prepare a position in a classroom debate

2. Short Investigations

Many teachers use short investigations to assess how well students have mastered basic concepts and skills. Most short investigations begin with a stimulus, like a math problem, political cartoon, map, or excerpt from a primary source. The teacher may ask students to interpret, describe, calculate, explain, or predict. These investigations may use enhanced multiple-choice questions. Or they may use concept mapping, a

technique that assesses how well students understand relationships among concepts. ([Concept map printable](#))

3. Open-Response Questions

Open-response questions, like short investigations, present students with a stimulus and ask them to respond. Responses include:

- a brief written or oral answer
- a mathematical solution
- a drawing
- a diagram, chart, or graph

4. Portfolios

A portfolio documents learning over time. This long-term perspective accounts for student improvement and teaches students the value of self-assessment, editing, and revision. A student portfolio can include:

- journal entries and reflective writing
- peer reviews
- artwork, diagrams, charts, and graphs
- group reports
- student notes and outlines
- rough drafts and polished writing

5. Self-Assessment

Self-assessment requires students to evaluate their own participation, process, and products. Evaluative questions are the basic tools of self-assessment. Students give written or oral responses to questions like:

- What was the most difficult part of this project for you?
- What do you think you should do next?
- If you could do this task again, what would you do differently?
- What did you learn from this project?

Many teachers find that authentic assessment is most successful when students know what teachers expect. For this reason, teachers should always clearly define standards and expectations. Educators often use rubrics, or established sets of criteria, to assess student work.

Because authentic assessment emphasizes process and performance, it encourages students to practice critical-thinking skills and to get excited about the things they are learning. Try it in your classroom!

Related Resources
