# P-1: Create or obtain assessments

TEACHFORAMERICA

## Choose your methods of assessment

Determine which method would best align with the product students need to produce. Most of these methods can be used as diagnostic, summative, or formative assessments. No single method is best for in all cases. The best teachers use a combination of methods to test student mastery.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Tests and quizzes** | • Most common form of assessment<br>• Excellent for gathering quantifiable data to compare student performance across a class or school<br>• Flexible in structure and form |
| **Performance assessments or tasks**<br><br>(To see examples, visit the P-1 Tools section) | • require students to demonstrate a task rather than simply answer questions<br>• designed to be similar to the challenges that adults face every day, requiring students to use higher-order thinking skills, such as judging, innovating, and creating rather than reciting, responding, or listing.<br>• often termed "authentic" assessments because they ask students to perform tasks in a real-world-like context – for a specific purpose and audience under realistic constraints.<br>• can reveal the highest possible level of student mastery since they require students to actively apply knowledge and skills in an unprompted, novel situation<br>• Can be challenging to create effectively, and to administer and grade efficiently. |
| **Portfolios** | • contain a variety of student work (from writing samples to standardized tests scores)<br>• can be used both to help students identify areas for improvement and to present a summative picture of students' progress<br>• students identify appropriate work samples to include in portfolios—either to reflect the children's best work, or to show steady progress over time<br>• encourage students to reflect upon and assess their own accomplishments.<br>• frequently include written teacher evaluations and student self-assessments of the portfolio contents. |
| **Journals** | • can be used as any type of assessment<br>• provide a useful record of student work over time when communicating with students and parents about student achievement and needed areas of growth.<br>• can be used for students to write about what they have learned or apply what they have learned to a new situation |
| **Standardized tests** | • used by most school districts as mandatory benchmarks of student progress across the district, state, or country<br>• often the most accessible way of measuring progress over longer periods of time and comparing progress among schools and districts within a state<br>• often set a low bar for student achievement, so using them as your sole method of goal-setting is not always a recipe for high expectations. |

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## Question types

All the question types below are appropriate for different purposes, and many teachers incorporate several different question types into one assessment. Consider the **limitations and benefits** of each question type (see table below this one) to determine what will work best to assess your learning goals.

| Types | | Purposes | Examples |
|---|---|---|---|
| **questions that are generally not open to interpretation** | **Multiple choice** | Discriminate between options, comprehend concepts, make simple judgments | Where are you most likely to find freshwater trout? (a) the Dead Sea, (b) Lake Tahoe, (c) the Atlantic Ocean, (d) the neighborhood pond. |
| | **Matching, sequencing** | Identifying relationships, classifying items, charting cause and effect | • Label the following items with an (E) for executive branch, (L) for legislative or (J) for judicial.<br>• Put the following events in chronological order. |
| | **True-false, yes-no** | Knowledge of generalizations, relationships and examples; predicting, evaluating | Under the first amendment, you have the right to:<br>Assemble peaceably T F<br>Say anything you want T F |
| | **Factual short answer, fill-ins** | Recalling or classifying facts, terms or concepts, solving simple science and mathematical problems | • Define tundra.<br>• Draw a diagram explaining the water cycle.<br>• Name the political philosophy promoted in the following speech. |
| **questions that are more open-ended and allow for greater interpretation** | **Higher-order short answer** | Summarizing, applying, concluding, evaluating, predicting, analyzing | • After reading the news story below, write a summarizing headline.<br>• Given her previous actions, what is Lady Macbeth likely to do next? |
| | **Short or long essay** | Organizing ideas, developing a logical argument, comparing concepts, evaluating a position or data, communicating thoughts or feelings, demonstrating original thinking | • Read the above poem (John Dunne's "Death Be Not Proud") and describe the purpose and power of its major metaphor.<br>• What would Darwin say about human cloning were he alive today? |

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## Considerations for Assessment Question Types

To select the appropriate question types for your assessment, you should consider a number of different factors. These factors may include the content of the unit; the breadth of material you are teaching; the efficiency of creating and administering the questions; the depth of knowledge your questions can reveal; and elements that may distort the accuracy of your questions. To help sort through these various factors, use the chart below for guidance:

| Key Factors to Consider | Multiple choice, matching, true/false, fill-in, etc. | High-order short answer, essay, etc. |
|---|---|---|
| | questions generally not open for interpretation | questions that are more open-ended and allow greater room for interpretation |
| **Content (or type of learning) Best Assessed** | **Efficient** for measuring Knowledge, Comprehension, Application levels of Bloom's | **Inefficient** for measuring Knowledge (although not impossible); better for Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation |
| **Amount of Content Assessed** | Can include large number of items in one assessment, making it **efficient.** Broad coverage makes it easier to get an **accurate** picture of student mastery (more examples); easier to **scaffold** questions/content so exact misunderstanding can be targeted | Usually one or a few prompts makes broad coverage **less efficient** and **less accurate** since there are fewer opportunities to demonstrate mastery. However, if designed carefully, it can cover a breadth of knowledge by assessing students' ability to make connections across content topics |
| **Efficiency of Preparation and Creation** | Preparation of valid and reliable examples is difficult and can be **inefficient** | Preparation of good items is difficult but **more efficient** than objective assessment items |
| **Scoring** | Objective, **efficient**, easier to be **consistent** | Subjective, **inefficient** and harder to be **consistent,** but can be made more efficient with the use of a rubric or detailed grading system |
| **Factors Distorting Scores** | Reading ability, cheating, guessing | Writing ability, bluffing |
| **Probable Effect on Learning** | Encourages students to remember, interpret and use the ideas of others | Encourages students to organize, integrate and express their own ideas |