

PERFORMANCE TASKS

NARRATOR'S SCRIPT

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INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The focus of this module is on performance tasks.

By the end of this module, you should be able to define what a performance task is, list a variety of performance tasks, identify the benefits and challenges of performance tasks, know that there is a “what-who-how” framework that you can use to design performance tasks, and use the assessment blueprint to design assessment items.

KEY CONCEPTS

Types of Assessment Items

Now, let’s get started with a quick review of the three types of assessment items.

We can categorize assessment items into three types: selected-response items, constructed-response items and performance tasks.

Selected-response items ask students to select the correct answer from a list of options included in the item.¹

Constructed-response items ask students to write, or “construct,” the correct answer.²

¹ Kansas State Department of Education, “Assessment Literacy Project”; Ohio Department of Education, “How to Design and Select Quality Assessments”; Relay Graduate School of Education, *Designing and Evaluating Assessments* (2014); and Rhode Island Department of Education, “Deeping Assessment Literacy.”

² Ibid.

Performance Tasks

Performance tasks are the focus of this module. They ask students to create products or perform tasks to show their mastery of particular skills.³

Teachers at all grade levels and disciplines can use performance tasks to measure learning. A kindergarten teacher asks a student to count from 1 to 30 or say her ABCs. A first-grade teacher asks her students to read a passage out loud from a book. A fourth-grade physical education teacher asks her students to demonstrate skills they have developed during a unit on jumping rope. An eighth-grade visual arts teacher asks his students to use different media to create sculpted figures that convey actions or gestures. A middle-school science teacher asks her students to complete experiments to demonstrate that they can apply the scientific method and that they know how to use the scientific equipment they will use to do more advanced experiments. All teachers use performance tasks.

These examples illustrate how performance tasks take a wide variety of forms. They can be so informal that students don't even realize that they are happening, highly structured and standardized, or somewhere in between. They can last only a few minutes or take place over the course of a month.

You can use them for diagnostic, formative, interim or summative purposes.

You can include a performance task as an item within an assessment, or a single performance task can make up the entire assessment. We often use extended-response and long-essay items as performance tasks *within* a larger assessment. Performance tasks that serve as assessments *in and of themselves* often involve multiple steps and culminate with a physical, verbal, visual or written product.

We use scoring guides and rubrics to score all types of performance tasks.

Performance tasks offer several benefits beyond selected- and constructed-response items. First and foremost, they place student demonstration of ability at the center of assessment. They approximate real-world application of complex skills more closely than other types of items, and they allow students to actively demonstrate their learning and skills.

Consider a basic driving test. The test usually includes a multiple-choice component. For example, "How many feet away from a fire hydrant must you park? 1, 5, 10 or 15 feet."

But the most important component is the road test, when a student driver gets into a car and drives on local streets to demonstrate whether he or she has mastered the rules of the road and can apply them to a real-world situation.

Not all performance assessments are this "authentic." For instance, in a classroom setting, performance tasks often include essays, experiments, oral presentations, research papers and other tasks.

³ Ibid.

Performance assessments can also measure abilities beyond academic knowledge and skills, such as communication, cooperation, organization, time management, self-monitoring and persistence. Well-designed performance tasks are also typically more engaging for students than other types of assessments.

Performance tasks also come with a set of challenges. They can be time consuming to design and score in a consistent and unbiased manner.

How to Use a What-Who-How Framework to Design Performance Tasks

We will now describe in detail how to design performance tasks. We can apply these steps to writing and selecting most types of performance tasks, for example, oral presentations, research papers and demonstrations.

There's no such things as a "typical performance task," and in this sense, performance tasks are different from selected- and constructed-response items. However, you can use a simple "what-who-how" framework to design a performance task.

For example, you can ask:

What

What is the task? Is the task a written performance or a physical, verbal or visual performance? If the task is a written performance, you can use guidance from the module about how to write and select a constructed-response item to help you create or select a well-designed performance task.

Who

Will students work in groups or individually?

How

Will you prescribe the parameters of the task, or will students be allowed leeway to determine how to complete it? Will you time the task? If you time the task, how much time will you allot for students to complete the task? How and when will you communicate precise directions to the students?

Scoring Performance Tasks

Ideally, you will develop a well-designed scoring tool while you are developing each assessment item.

We typically use scoring guides and rubrics to score performance tasks. The module about scoring includes more information about well-designed scoring guides and rubrics.

Scoring guides assign points to different levels of student performance. Well-designed scoring guides reference the standards and/or skills addressed by the item, and they include an exemplar answer.

Rubrics show a clear progression toward mastery with descriptions of specific levels of student performance. A well-designed rubric has three parts: dimensions, performance levels and descriptors.

Which scoring tool you use to score a performance task will depend on the nature of the task.

For example, if you want to assign a single score based on a single set of criteria, you may develop a scoring guide.

If you want to measure several dimensions across different levels of student performance, you may develop a rubric.

How to Use the Assessment Blueprint

Let's use the assessment blueprint and assessment blueprint example to apply what we've learned.⁴

Imagine that you are a fifth-grade teacher planning a unit focused on reading and writing about informational texts. You expect the unit to last approximately four weeks.⁵

At the end of the unit, you plan to use a summative assessment to measure how well your students have mastered the relevant standards.

You have determined that the unit will focus on four reading informational text standards and one writing standard. You have "unpacked" the standards to identify and paraphrase the skills you plan to teach and assess. You have also identified a level of rigor for each item and possible types of items you may use to assess each skill.

You have written one selected-response item to address a single skill and one constructed-response item to address three skills.

Let's say that you want to address with your third assessment item two skills associated with the writing standard:

- Write an opinion piece on texts and
- Support your point of view with evidence.

You decide to write a performance task—an essay—which requires higher-level thinking and is worth 18 points.

The next step is to write the actual performance task, which includes developing all parts of the item and a scoring tool.

Here's an item from the assessment blueprint example:

⁴ Adapted from Ohio Department of Education, "Assessment Literacy: Identifying and Developing Valid and Reliable Assessments" (2013).

⁵ Ohio Department of Education, "Ohio's New Learning Standards: English Language Standards" (2010); and Student Achievement Partners, "Mini-Assessment for *Who Was Marco Polo?* by Joan Holub and *The Adventures of Marco Polo* by Russell Freedman" (2014).

The prompt reads:

Using information from both sources, the excerpt from Chapter 11 of *Who Was Marco Polo?* by Joan Holub and the excerpt from *The Adventures of Marco Polo* by Russell Freedman, write an essay in which you provide an opinion that either Marco Polo told the truth in his book or Marco Polo made up his stories. Your audience is classmates from your history class who have learned about Marco Polo. Be sure to use information from both of the texts to support your opinion. Write your essay in the space below.⁶

The rubric includes three dimensions and four performance levels. The dimensions are:

- Reading: Comprehension of Key Ideas and Details;
- Writing: Written Expression; and
- Writing: Knowledge of Language and Conventions.

The performance levels are 3, 2, 1 and 0 points.

You can read the rubric’s descriptors in the assessment blueprint example.⁷

You may be wondering why the rubric includes a dimension focused on language and conventions when this is not one of the standards included in the blueprint for this assessment. The reason is that teachers often include a category like this in writing rubrics, even when language and conventions are not part of the focus of the unit, as a way to remind students that they are always expected to “demonstrate [their] command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing.”⁸ On the other hand, if you intend to focus on a particular skill in this area during your non-fiction unit—for example, if you will instruct students on how to use a comma to separate an introductory element from the rest of a sentence—you should include that standard and skill in your blueprint.

This well-designed item illustrates the concepts we discussed in this module. The prompt is precise, and the item includes a well-designed rubric that is aligned with the skills you plan to measure.

Well-designed writing rubrics, like this one, are often generic enough that you could repurpose or adapt them for a variety of assignments. This rubric aligns well with this essay prompt and the standard on which it is based. For example, to earn the maximum of three points in the reading dimension, students must “[provide] an accurate analysis and [support] the analysis with effective textual evidence.” To earn three points in the “writing: written expression” dimension, they must write in a style appropriate to their audience and use relevant, text-based evidence to address the prompt.

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

We have addressed the key concepts in this module, so let’s review our goals.

⁶ Student Achievement Partners, “Mini-Assessment for *Who Was Marco Polo?* by Joan Holub and *The Adventures of Marco Polo* by Russell Freedman” (2014).

⁷ PARCC, *Grades 4 and 5 Condensed Scoring Rubric for Prose Constructed Response Items* (2013).

⁸ Ohio Department of Education, “Ohio’s New Learning Standards: English Language Standards” (2010).

At the outset of the module, we set goals that you would be able to define what a performance task is, list a variety of performance tasks, identify the benefits and challenges of performance tasks, know that there is a “what-who-how” framework you can use to design performance tasks, and use the assessment blueprint to design assessment items.

Although we cannot check to determine whether we have achieved all of these goals, let’s use two assessment items to see if we have achieved two of the goals.

Here’s the first item:

List a variety of performance tasks, either repeating those listed earlier in this module or using those you come up with on your own or in teams.

Pause this video if you want a few moments to think about your answer or discuss it with colleagues.

A sample answer to the first item would be: A kindergarten teacher asks a student to count from 1 to 30 or say her ABCs. A first-grade teacher asks her students to read a passage out loud from a book. A fourth-grade physical education teacher asks her students to demonstrate skills they have developed during a unit on jumping rope. An eighth-grade visual arts teacher asks his students to use different media to create sculpted figures that convey actions or gestures. A middle-school science teacher asks her students to complete experiments to demonstrate that they know how to apply scientific method and how to use the scientific equipment that they will use to do more advanced experiments.

Here’s the second item:

Describe one benefit and one challenge of performance tasks.

Pause this video if you want a few moments to think about your answer or discuss it with colleagues.

A sample answer to the second item would be: Performance tasks place student demonstration of ability at the center of assessment. They approximate real-world application of complex skills more closely than other types of items, and they allow students to actively demonstrate their learning and skills. On the other hand, performance tasks can be time consuming to design and score in a consistent and unbiased manner.

CONCLUSION

Good work! Thank you for completing the module on performance tasks. Please view additional modules to continue your learning.

SOURCES

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