

# PERFORMANCE TASKS

## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

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

### Performance Tasks

Performance tasks ask students to create products or perform tasks to show their mastery of particular skills.<sup>1</sup> 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. 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.

- Performance tasks place student demonstration of ability at the center of assessment.
- Performance tasks approximate real-world application of complex skills.
- Allow students to actively demonstrate their learning and skills.
- Performance tasks can measure abilities beyond academic knowledge and skills.
- Performance tasks are typically more engaging for students.

#### Performance tasks also come with challenges.

- Performance tasks 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

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.



### 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?

