

# SCORING

## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

By the end of this module, you should be able to define what scoring means for the purpose of these modules and explain how and why you should use well-designed tools, such as answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics, to score many assessments. You should also be able to explain what distinguishes one tool from another.

## KEY CONCEPTS

### Scoring

We use a variety of strategies to score assessments and assessment items. For example, you may use an answer key to score an assessment composed of selected-response items, or you may use a rubric to score a complex performance task. You may score an assessment yourself, with another teacher or with a team of teachers. No matter what your strategy, you should use an appropriate, well-designed tool to ensure that your assessment provides accurate information about what students know and can do.<sup>1</sup> For example, let's imagine that you are on a team of sixth-grade English teachers who administer the same essay prompt to your students as a summative assessment. After students turn in their essays, you and the other teachers exchange papers to grade the assessment, with two teachers grading each student's essay. Over the course of a week, you and your colleagues read each student's work to assign a grade. You then average the two grades attributed to each student to determine his or her final grade.

Why might this method fail to provide you with the most accurate information about what your students know and can do?

- First, you may unintentionally score the work of students on Monday differently from the work you score on Tuesday. Or you may compare one student's work to another's. This assessment will not only measure what students know and can do, but it will also measure when and in what order you scored the assessment.
- Second, you and the other teachers may apply different standards to the essays. Should you take points off for incorrect writing mechanics? Is it important for the essay to have a clear thesis statement or for students to cite evidence from texts? Without this level of agreement, students' scores may depend on their mastery of the relevant standard and on who happened to score their work.
- Third, although you read each essay carefully, you may miss an opportunity to identify specific skills with which your students are struggling.



Answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics are three tools that provide a concrete set of criteria to score the work of students.

### Answer Keys

Answer keys provide the correct answer to an assessment item. You would use them when a student response is either correct or incorrect, typically for selected- and constructed-response items. Answer keys can be as simple as the correct letters to multiple-choice items or the correct words for fill-in-the-blank items. They can also be exemplar student responses to short-answer items. Some well-designed answer keys explain why each choice is correct or incorrect, and provide a rationale for an exemplar response. Taking the time to think about these rationales as you write your assessments can help you diagnose common student errors, adjust your instructional strategies and plan areas for re-teaching.

### Scoring Guides

Scoring guides are another tool we use to score assessments. Scoring guides assign points to different levels of student performance. They are useful because they allow students to earn points for partial mastery of standards, and they ensure that students who earn full points have mastered the relevant standard or standards rather than simply guessed the correct answer. You would use them when a student response can earn some of the total possible points, typically for constructed-response items and performance tasks. Well-designed scoring guides reference the standards and/or skills addressed by the item, and sometimes they include an exemplar answer.

### Rubrics

Rubrics are a third tool at our disposal. Rubrics articulate levels of performance in relation to standards or other expectations. Unlike scoring guides, which describe how students earn points or credit for their answers, rubrics assign students ratings based on how well their response meets performance levels. We use rubrics to know when a student has reached or exceeded an expected level of performance or what he or she needs to do to make progress, typically with performance tasks and portfolio assessments.

## CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

### Assessment Items

1. Describe in a paragraph the differences between answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Describe in a paragraph why you should use an appropriate, well-designed tool to make sure that your assessment provides accurate information about what students know and can do.

---

### Answers

1. Describe in a paragraph the differences between answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics.

*Answer keys provide the correct answer to an assessment item. Teachers use them when a student response is either correct or incorrect, typically for selected- and constructed-response items. Scoring guides assign points to different levels of student performance. Teachers use them when a student response can earn some of the total possible points, typically for constructed-response items and performance tasks. Rubrics show a clear progression toward mastery with descriptions of specific levels of student performance. Teachers use them to know when a student has mastered a skill or what he or she needs to do in order to make progress, typically with performance tasks and portfolio assessments.*
2. Describe in a paragraph why you should use an appropriate, well-designed tool to make sure that your assessment provides accurate information about what students know and can do.

*Answer keys, scoring guides and rubrics are three tools that provide a concrete set of criteria to score the work of students. They support consistency when a teacher or team of teachers score an assessment. For example, if I score an assessment without a scoring tool, I may unintentionally use one set of criteria to score the work of some students and different criteria for other students. In this case, the assessment will not only measure what students know and can do, but it will also measure when and in what order I scored the assessment. A group of teachers scoring an assessment without a scoring tool can face the same challenge. Without agreement on the criteria that they will use to score an assessment, a student's score may depend on his or her mastery of the relevant standard and on who happened to score his or her work. Finally, if they do not use a scoring tool, teachers may miss opportunities to identify specific skills with which their students struggle.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Kansas State Department of Education, "Assessment Literacy Project"; Ohio Department of Education, "Assessment Literacy: Identifying and Developing Valid and Reliable Assessments" (2013); Relay Graduate School of Education, *Designing and Evaluating Assessments* (2014); and Rhode Island Department of Education, "Deeping Assessment Literacy."