

Authentic Assessments

Purpose: Authentic assessments ask students to apply what they've learned in meaningful, discipline-specific contexts. These real-world tasks promote deeper engagement, critical thinking, and knowledge transfer beyond the classroom. Rather than emphasizing rote memorization, authentic assessments focus on performance, process, and applied learning keeping formative and summative assessments in mind.

Formative vs Summative Assessment

1. **Formative Assessment:** evaluates learning throughout the course (typically low to medium stakes).
 - a. Helps your students see if they're on the right track
 - b. Feedback (peer, self, instructor) is important
 - c. Examples: small quizzes, minute papers, writing exercises
 - d. **Formative feedback:** meant for revising, such as feedback on a draft or a low-stakes assignment
2. **Summative Assessment:** evaluates cumulative learning from the entire course (typically high stakes).
 - a. Falls at the end of a topic, unit, or course
 - b. Previous activities and assessments have prepared students for summative assessment
 - c. Examples: exams, final projects, final presentations
 - d. **Summative feedback:** designed for students to show their mastery on a final exam or project

Strategies and Steps for Implementation

1. **Start with the End in Mind**
 - a. Ask: *What do I want students to be able to do after completing this course?*

- b.** Focus on observable skills, performance, and the transfer of learning to new situations.

2. Design a Real-World Task

- a.** Choose assignments that mirror real-world or professional challenges relevant to your field.
- b.** Examples: case studies, project proposals, simulations, multimedia presentations, policy briefs.

3. Build in Formative Practice

- a.** Use low-stakes activities such as drafts, peer reviews, or progress updates so students can practice before high-stakes assessments.
- b.** This scaffolding promotes learning from failure and supports student confidence.

4. Use Clear Criteria and Rubrics

- a.** Develop and share a rubric early in the assignment process.
- b.** Define expectations and levels of performance to help guide student work and streamline feedback.

5. Integrate Feedback Opportunities

- a.** Plan feedback touch points across the assignment timeline.
- b.** Use a mix of instructor, peer, and self-feedback that is timely, targeted, and forward-facing to support revision and learning.

6. Balance Assessment Types

- a.** Avoid over reliance on summative assessments.
- b.** Use a variety of formative tools (e.g., Canvas quizzes, reflections, drafts) to help students connect ideas, think critically, and prepare for final deliverables.

7. Reflect and Revise

- a. After the course ends, assess the effectiveness of the task. Ask:
 - i. What did students do well?
 - ii. Where did they struggle?
 - iii. What changes would improve the task for future courses?

Instructor Planning Guide

1. **Learning Outcomes:** What specific skills or knowledge should students demonstrate by the end of the course?
2. **Authentic Task Design:** What real-world task could reflect the goals of this course?
3. **Scaffolding & Practice:** How can I break this task into parts or steps that build toward the final version?
4. **Criteria & Rubric:** What are the key dimensions of success? How will I define quality for each?
5. **Feedback Opportunities:** Where can students receive feedback along the way?
6. **Reflection & Revision:** How will I reflect on student performance to improve the task in the future?

Instructor Checklist

- ☐ I have identified clear, course-aligned outcomes for the assessment.
- ☐ The task resembles a real-world or professional application of course content.
- ☐ I've built in at least one low-stakes opportunity for students to practice.
- ☐ Students receive timely, constructive feedback before the final submission.
- ☐ My rubric is shared in advance and explains expectations clearly.
- ☐ I will reflect on the results and revise for future offerings.

Resource: [Evaluations Institute](#) (Harvard DCE self-paced training)