

Theories, principles and models of assessment

This handout will cover:

- Why should assessment take place?
- The assessment cycle
- Theories of assessment
- Concepts of assessment
- Principles of assessment
- VARCS
- SMART
- Roles of an assessor
- Types of assessment
- Reading list
- Website list

The text here is a brief introduction to a few theories of assessment and you are advised to research them further.

Why should assessment take place?

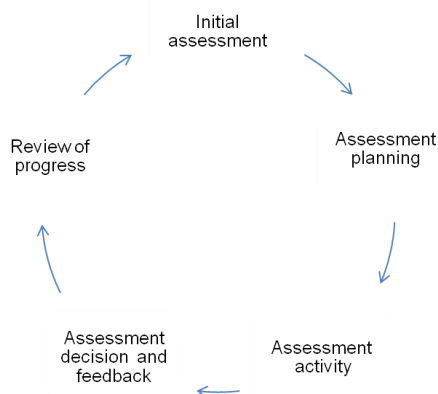
Assessment should focus on improving and reinforcing learning as well as measuring and documenting learners' progress and achievements. It should help your learners realise how they are developing and what they need to do to improve and/or progress further. Maintaining records ensures there is proof of what took place and when.

Assessment is a regular process; it might not always be formalised, but you will be observing what your learners are doing, asking them questions, and reviewing their progress whenever you are in contact with them. If you also teach or train, your learners will be demonstrating their knowledge and skills regularly, for example through activities, discussions and regular tasks. You are therefore constantly making judgments about their progress and how they could improve. You should also be aware of the impact that your comments and grades can have on your learner's confidence when you give them feedback. Comments which specifically focus on the activity or work produced, rather than the individual, will be more helpful and motivating to your learners.

Assessment should not be confused with evaluation, assessment is of the learner, evaluation is of the programme that the learner is taking, for example, a qualification. Assessment is specific towards learners' achievements and how they can improve. Evaluation is a quality assurance monitoring tool. It includes obtaining feedback from your learners and others, for example, employers, line managers and quality assurers, to help you improve the overall learner experience as well as your own practice.

Assessment can be towards a formal qualification, a set of standards or something else such as a job specification or work task.

Assessment usually follows a model such as the aspects in the assessment cycle:



Initial assessment – ascertaining information regarding your learners: for example, any specific assessment requirements they may have or any further training and support that they may need. This information can be obtained in a range of ways, for example, application forms, interviews, diagnostic tests and discussions. This process might not always be carried out by you but the information obtained must be passed on to you. Initial assessment is known as assessment for learning, because it helps prepare learners for assessment and identifies their potential.

Assessment planning – agreeing suitable types and methods of assessment with learners, setting appropriate target dates and involving others as necessary, such as colleagues, witnesses or workplace supervisors.

Assessment activity – using relevant approaches and activities, for example, observation, questioning, assignments or gathering appropriate evidence of competence. Assessment can be formative (usually ongoing and informal to check progress e.g. a discussion) and/or summative (usually at the end and formal e.g. a test). Summative assessment is often known as assessment of learning because it counts towards the achievement of something.

Assessment decision and feedback – making a judgement of success or otherwise or allocating a grade and advising how to achieve a higher grade in future. Providing constructive and developmental feedback and agreeing upon any further action that may be necessary.

Review of progress – reviewing progress and achievement and discussing any other issues that may be relevant to the learning and assessment process.

The cycle can then begin again with an initial assessment regarding the next area to be assessed. Records should be maintained throughout all aspects of the assessment cycle and quality assurance activities should take place on an ongoing basis.

Theories of assessment

Whilst there are many theories of learning, there is very little regarding assessment. However, a key theory is that assessment is:

- formative: ongoing and informal – often referred to as assessment *for* learning
- summative: final and formal – often referred to as assessment *of* learning

Formative assessment checks progress e.g. by using questions, quizzes & discussions. Summative assessment confirms achievement (or not) e.g. by using tests, exams, assignments & observations.

Concepts of assessment

Concepts are the aspects involved throughout the assessment process, for example the points in *italics* in the following text:

You need to *be accountable* to your learners and your organisation to ensure you are carrying out your role as an assessor correctly. Your learners should know why they are being assessed and what they have to do to meet the assessment criteria. You will also be accountable to the awarding organisation if you assess their accredited qualifications. You might be accountable to employers if you are assessing their staff in the work environment.

You may be required to analyse *achievement* data and compare this to national or organisational targets. The funding your organisation receives might also be related to your learners' achievements. It's always a useful evaluation method to keep a record of how many learners you have, how many successfully complete their programme and in what timescale.

Following the *assessment strategy* for your subject will ensure you are carrying out your role correctly and holding or working towards the required assessor qualifications. These requirements are usually stated in the qualification specification or standards.

Benchmarking involves comparing what is the accepted standard for a particular subject area against the current position of your own learners' performance. Using benchmarking data can help inform target setting for individuals or groups. If learners don't achieve the benchmark, an evaluation will need to take place and improvements implemented. Benchmarking can also be used to compare organisations which provide a similar service, or used within the same organisation to compare performance in different locations.

Methods of assessment - these might be produced by you or other staff at your organisation such as: assignments, projects or questions which will also be marked by you. *Externally devised assessments* are usually produced by an awarding organisation, for example, an examination. *Formal* assessments usually count towards achievement of a qualification, whereas *informal* assessments are used to monitor ongoing progress and development.

Progression should be taken into account when assessing learners, i.e. what they are going to do next. It could be another unit of the current qualification, or a different level of qualification, either at your organisation, in the work environment or elsewhere. Progression opportunities should always be discussed with your learner to ensure they are on the right route and that they are capable of achieving.

To assist *transparency*, you need to ensure that everyone who is involved in the assessment process clearly understands what is expected and can see there is nothing untoward taking place. That includes your own interpretation and understanding of the assessment requirements as well as that of your learners. You should be honest with your learners and not let them feel they have achieved more than they are capable of.

Types of assessment include initial, formative, and summative as well as diagnostic tests which ascertain a learner's current knowledge and experience. Some types of diagnostic tests can also identify learners with dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia or other areas for support. Initial assessment is carried out prior to or at the beginning of a programme to identify your learner's starting point and level. Formative assessment is ongoing, and summative assessment is at the end of something.

Auditable records must always be maintained throughout the assessment process.

Evaluation of the assessment process should always take place to inform current and future practice. All aspects of the assessment cycle should be evaluated on an ongoing basis and feedback obtained from all involved.

Principles of assessment

Principles are how the assessment process is put into practice, for example, being:

- **Ethical:** the methods used are right and proper for what is being assessed and the context of assessment. The learner's welfare, health, safety and security are not compromised.
- **Safe:** the learner's work can be confirmed as valid and authentic. There should be little chance of plagiarism, confidentiality of information should be taken into

account and learning and assessment should not be compromised in any way, nor the learner's experience or potential to achieve. (Safe in this context does not relate to health and safety but to whether the assessment methods are sufficiently robust to make a reliable decision.)

- Fair: the methods used are appropriate to all learners at the required level, taking into account any particular needs. All learners should have an equal chance of an accurate assessment decision.

Two important principles are known by the acronyms VARCS and SMART:

- Valid – the work is relevant to what has been assessed and is at the right level.
- Authentic – the work has been produced solely by the learner.
- Reliable – the work is consistent over time.
- Current – the work is still relevant at the time of assessment.
- Sufficient – the work covers all of the requirements at the time.

Following VARCS will help ensure assessment is carried out correctly.

- Specific – the activity relates only to what is being assessed and is clearly stated
- Measurable – the activity can be measured against the assessment requirements, allowing any gaps to be identified
- Achievable – the activity can be achieved at the right level
- Relevant – the activity is suitable and realistic, relates to what is being assessed and will give consistent results
- Timebound – target dates and times are agreed

Planning SMART assessment activities will ensure all the assessment requirements will be met by learners, providing they have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge beforehand.

Roles of an assessor

Your main roles will be to:

Carry out assessments according to the qualification requirements, or those of the programme, standard, job specification or work task being assessed.

Follow all internal and external organisational requirements, regulations and legislation.

For example:

Internal (i.e. policies and procedures):	External:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access and fair assessment • appeals and complaints • confidentiality of information • copyright and data protection • equality and diversity • health, safety and welfare • internal quality assurance • plagiarism • safeguarding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regulatory bodies such as Ofqual and Ofsted • awarding organisations/external bodies who accredit qualifications and standards • legal aspects such as Data Protection, Health and Safety, Safeguarding, Equality, Counter-Terrorism and Security (Prevent Duty)

There will also be organisational codes of practice which you must follow, such as dress, sustainability and access to the internet.

Your role as an assessor will also be to inspire and motivate your learners. If you are enthusiastic and passionate about your subject, this will help to encourage and challenge your learners. Your learners may already be motivated for personal reasons and be enthusiastic and want to perform well. This is known as intrinsic motivation. They may be motivated by a need to learn, for example to gain a qualification, promotion or pay rise at work, known as extrinsic motivation.

If you can recognise the difference between your learners' wants and needs, you can appreciate why they are motivated and ensure you make their experience meaningful and relevant. Whatever type of motivation your learners have will be transformed, for better or worse, by what happens during their assessment experience.

Types of assessment

Types of assessment relate to the *purpose* of assessment i.e. the reason it is carried out. Five frequently used types are:

- initial
- diagnostic
- formative
- summative
- holistic

Different subjects will require different types of assessment. You will need to consider what type of assessment you need to use and why. You can then plan when, where and how this will take place.

Initial assessment is carried out at the beginning of something, for example, a course or a session.

Diagnostic assessment can be carried out at any time to diagnose any gaps in learning, or any particular learning or learner needs. They are the formal processes whereby you can ascertain your learners' prior skills and knowledge. It's also an opportunity to identify any aspects which might otherwise go unnoticed, for example, poor numerical or writing skills.

Formative assessment should take place continually and is usually carried out informally to check progress, identify any support requirements and inform further development. Assessing your learners on a formative basis will enable you to see if they are ready for a summative or final assessment. Formative assessment is usually informal, devised by yourself, and often called assessment for learning because it helps prepare learners for formal assessment.

Summative assessment usually occurs at the end of a session, programme, topic, unit or full qualification. It is a measure of achievement rather than progress. This type of assessment can often be quite stressful to learners and sometimes leads to a fail result, even though the learner is quite capable under other circumstances. Summative assessment is usually formal, devised by the awarding organisation that accredits the qualification, and is often called assessment of learning because it counts towards the achievement of something.

Holistic assessment enables learners to demonstrate several criteria from different aspects or units at the same time. You might be able to observe naturally occurring situations in addition to what had originally been planned. For example, if you are watching a learner perform a task and they also do something which had not been planned for, but which occurs naturally during the activity. Don't discount this, but inform your learner you were able to assess them for these other aspects as well. It can also save duplication and repetition.

Reading list

Armitage A & Renwick M (2008) *Assessment in FE: A Practical Guide for Lecturers* London Bloomsbury

Gravells A (2021) *Principles and Practices of Assessment* London Learning Matters SAGE

Greer et al (2019) *The Vocational Assessor Handbook* (7th Edn) London Kogan Page

Mansell S (2020) *50 Assessment Approaches* London Learning Matters SAGE

Ofqual (2009) *Authenticity – a guide for teachers* Coventry Ofqual

Read H (2016) *The Best Assessor's Guide* Bideford Read On Publications Ltd

Tummons J (2011) *Assessing Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector* Exeter Learning Matters

Wilson (2012) *Practical Teaching: A Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance* Hampshire Cengage Learning

Wilson L (2012) *Practical teaching: A guide to assessment and quality assurance* Andover Cengage Learning

Website list

Assessment in education - <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/caie20/24/1>

Assessor resources - www.anngravells.com/resources/assessment123

Plagiarism: www.plagiarism.org

Chartered Institute for Educational Assessors – www.ciea.org.uk

Initial Assessment Tools – www.toolslibrary.co.uk

Types of assessment - <https://www.marketing91.com/types-of-assessment/>

Methods of assessment - <https://www.reading.ac.uk/engageinassessment/different-ways-to-assess/eia-different-assessment-methods.aspx>

Reading lists - <https://www.anngravells.com/reading-lists/index>