

Keep tabs on student achievement with authentic assessments

You and your CTE team have probably heard some of the buzz about the value of authentic assessment. But you may have wondered what this term really means in the classroom and how to tell if your methods of measuring student learning are truly making the grade.

If so, you are not alone. Instructors often misinterpret the phrase “authentic assessment,” making the concept more confusing than it really is, said **William G. Camp**, professor and program leader of agricultural science education at **Cornell University**.

Authentic assessment means measuring student learning based on the objectives of instruction, he said.

But while the idea is straightforward, there are many ways to go wrong. These include: testing students on what you wanted them to take away from the lesson, rather than what was taught; or testing students on material that was related, but not actually presented, Camp said. For example, if a health occupations teacher taught her students the steps for taking a patient’s blood pressure, it would not be an authentic assessment if the teacher then gave a quiz asking students to identify the reasons for high blood pressure.

Instead, Camp stressed the need for a one-to-one match between what is taught and what is tested.

Getting it right

To ensure that you and your CTE team can make that match, note the learning objectives you have for students, then build the lesson based on those objectives, Camp advised.

Afterwards, you should assess on the same objectives to ensure consistency.

Camp also offered these tips to make assessments authentic:

- **Pick the right type of assessment.**

While a written test can be an authentic assessment in cases where you want to measure students’ knowledge of theory, it is unlikely to be the best choice for assessment if your instructor is focused on a hands-on technical task. Carefully consider what method would allow CTE students to best demonstrate proficiency and apply information in a real-world context.

- **Detail your assessment expectations.**

For project-based assessments, give students a road map. Camp said he prefers project-based tasks for many of his assessments because they require students to actually tackle material they have learned about. However, for this type of authentic assessment, it is most useful to students if they have a clear understanding

of what the instructor expects, he added.

Camp often provides students with carefully detailed rubrics and offers them plenty of chances for self- and peer-evaluation before turning in an entire project. He also provides feedback on each piece of the project by giving mini-deadlines for each portion of the assignment.

Keep in mind that you can also use the rubric to ensure that your instruction matches your assessment. If you notice discrepancies between what was presented in class and what you are asking students to do in the project, it is a good idea to tweak the instruction to meet your initial learning objectives.

For more information, e-mail William Camp at wgc4@cornell.edu.

Key points

- Good evaluations assess learning based on instructional objectives.
- There should be a match between what is taught and what is tested.
- Selecting evaluations should be part of lesson planning.

Are you giving efficient evaluations?

It can be tempting simply to give a test after a unit of instruction, rather than considering what form of assessment might be most appropriate. However, you should encourage instructors not to make this a default method of assessment. Ask your team to use tests and quizzes only when assessing whether students know a given set of facts or a theory in the field, said **William G. Camp**, professor and program leader of agricultural science education at **Cornell University**.

For more technical knowledge, encourage instructors to try a portfolio or a project in which students can apply and demonstrate what they have learned. Instructors can make these kinds of assessments more time efficient by breaking them into several mini-projects and grading the material in chunks, Camp said. In addition, remind instructors that once they become familiar with these types of assessments, it will streamline the process of measuring student achievement even further.