

Some Assessment Techniques

No technique is perfect, and good assessment requires the use of multiple, complementary measures. Criteria for choosing a particular assessment technique include how well it measures the particular outcome under study, and how much effort it entails for the result that will be obtained. Wherever possible, departments should make use of data that they are already generating and use assessment measures that contribute to student learning.

	Measures	Advantages	Disadvantages
Direct Measures of Learning			
Examinations	Content knowledge, some skills		
Commercial standardized exams		Low time investment National norms	Expense May not match specific program goals
Locally developed exams		Matches local goals Development and grading processes are informative	Difficult to develop valid instruments Time-consuming
Oral examinations		As for locally developed exams, but allows in-depth probing	Too time-consuming for use except for high priority objectives and small programs
“Real-world” approaches	Skills, application and generalization of learning		
Performance appraisals		Better than paper and pencil in measuring skill acquisition	Time-consuming, may be subjective, observation may affect results
Simulations		May be a more practical way of measuring skills than performance appraisal	More expensive than traditional testing
Experiential and capstone or keystone courses and projects	Knowledge, skills, application and generalization of learning	Synergism between learning and assessment Excellent tool for assessing more complex learning objectives	Curricular logistics
Student portfolios	Student growth over time	Power Inclusion of students in assessment process	Time and logistics
Indirect Measures of Learning			
Self-reports	Perceptions and attitudes		
Surveys		Inexpensive Acknowledges importance of student (or alumni) opinions	Not a direct measure of learning Difficult to develop valid instruments
Interviews		Allows individualization and follow-up probes May develop positive interactions with students	May be intimidating, biasing results Time-consuming
Small group interviews		As for interviews, but allows more students to be “interviewed” in less time	A few students can skew the results if not carefully performed
Third-party reports	Employer or parent satisfaction	Provides an external measure	May be difficult to obtain useful data
Archival records	Biographical, academic and other data	Readily available Useful for interpreting other data	Not a direct measure of learning Privacy considerations