

## **Assessment Methods—A Menu of Options** (by Rick Stiggins)

Throughout our school careers, both as students and as teachers, we have encountered thousands of different assessments. Although the variations are endless, all of the assessments we have experienced and give today fail into one of four basic categories of methods:

- **Selected response and short answer**
- **Extended written response**
- **Performance assessment**
- **Personal communication**

All four methods are legitimate options when their use correlates highly with the learning target and the intended use of the information. (Portions of the following discussion are adapted from Stiggins, 2005.)

### **Selected Response**

Selected response and short answer methods consist of those in which students select the correct or best response from a list provided. Formats include multiple choice, true/false, matching, short answer, and fill-in questions. (Although short answer and fill-in-the-blank do require students to generate an answer, they call for a very brief answer that is counted right or wrong, so we include these options in the selected response category.) For all selected response assessments, students' scores are figured as the number or proportion of questions answered correctly.

### **Extended Written Response**

Extended written response assessment requires students to construct a written answer in response to a question or task rather than to select one from a list. An extended written response is one that is at least several sentences in length. Examples include the following:

- Compare pieces of literature, solutions to environmental problems, or economic events.
- Analyze artwork, forms of government, or solutions to problems.
- Interpret music, scientific information, or polling data.
- Solve a mathematics problem and show and explain all work.
- Describe in detail a scientific, mathematical, or economics process or principle, such as how supply and demand works.

We judge correctness of extended written responses by applying one of two types of predetermined scoring criteria. One type gives points for specific pieces of information that are present. For example, when students in a biology class are asked to describe the Krebs cycle, points might be awarded for noting that the cycle describes the sequence of reactions by which cells generate energy, takes place in the mitochondria, consumes oxygen, produces carbon dioxide and water as waste products, and converts ADP to energy—rich ATP. The second type of criteria can take the form of a rubric, such as a general rubric for making comparisons, which can be applied to any exercise calling for comparison.

Scores therefore also take one of two forms: number or percentage of points attained, or rubric scores.

### **Performance Assessment**

Performance assessment is assessment based on observation and judgment; we look at a performance or product and make a judgment as to its quality. Examples include the following:

- Complex performances such as playing a musical instrument, carrying out the steps in a scientific experiment, speaking a foreign language, reading aloud with fluency, repairing an engine, or working productively in a group. In these cases it is the doing—the process—that is important.
- Creating complex products such as a term paper, a lab report, or a work of art. In these cases what counts is not so much the process of creation (although that may be evaluated, too), but the level of quality of the product itself.

As with extended written response assessments, performance assessments have two parts: a performance task or exercise and a scoring guide. Again, the scoring guide can award points for specific features of a performance or product that are present, or it can take the form of a rubric, in which levels of quality are described. For example, to assess the ability to do a simple process, such as threading a sewing machine, doing long division, or safely operating a band saw, points might be awarded for each step done in the correct order. Or, for more complex processes or products, you might have a rubric for judging quality that has several dimensions, such as ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency and conventions in writing, or content, organization, presentation, and use of language in an oral presentation. Again, scores could be reported in number or percent of points earned, or in terms of a rubric score.

### **Personal Communication**

Gathering information about students through personal communication is just what it sounds like—we find out what students have learned through interacting with them. Examples include the following:

- Looking at and responding to students' comments in journals and logs
- Asking questions during instruction
- Interviewing students in conferences
- Listening to students as they participate in class
- Giving examinations orally

We usually think of this as informal, rather than formal assessment (in which results are recorded for later use). Often it is. However, as long as the learning target and criteria for judging response quality are clear, information gathered via personal communication can be used to provide descriptive feedback to students, for instructional planning, and for student self-reflection and goal setting. If planned well and recorded systematically, information from personal communication can be used as the basis for assessments of that learning.

Student responses are evaluated in one of two ways. Sometimes the questions we ask require students to provide a simple, short answer, and all we're looking for is whether the answer is correct or incorrect. This is parallel to scoring for written selected response questions. Questions during instruction usually call for this short answer oral responses.

Other times, student oral responses are longer and more complex, parallel to extended written response questions. Just as with extended written response, we evaluate the quality of oral responses using a rubric or scoring guide. Longer, more complicated responses would occur, for example, during oral examination or oral presentations.