

III-B. Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom

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Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom

Trainer Guide Overview

This workshop module contains detailed instructions and all the materials necessary to conduct a training session on assessment in the adult ESL classroom. The module has three components:

- ▶ Trainer Guide
- ▶ Trainer Notes
- ▶ Participant Handouts

The Trainer Guide is the trainer’s script for the training session. The introduction states the rationale and purpose of the workshop. It also gives the goal and objectives of the workshop, the workshop agenda, an overview of workshop sections with the amount of time to be spent on each section, trainer preparation instructions, and materials needed. The introduction is followed by detailed sequential instructions for conducting each section of the workshop.

The introduction to each section states the purpose of the activities and the timing of that section. This is followed by a two-column table with instructions for each activity in the first column (Action) and the materials needed in the second column (Materials). Hard copies of all the materials needed (with the exception of non-CAELA publications) are provided in the Trainer Notes or the Participant Handouts. Materials are listed by title followed by the page number on which they can be found and TN (indicating it can be found in the Trainer Notes) or PH (indicating it can be found in the Participant Handouts). Ordering information for non-CAELA publications is given in the workshop introduction. Materials that need to be made into transparencies for use with an overhead projector or PowerPoint slides are marked “Transparency or PowerPoint Slide.” You will need to prepare them before the training session.

The Trainer Notes accompanies the script of the Trainer Guide. It includes copies of all the participant handouts, answer keys to participant activities, transparencies or PowerPoint slides to be made, and other supplemental handouts if appropriate. The contents of the Trainer Notes are organized in the order they are needed in the session, and the place they will be used is indicated in the Materials column in this Trainer Guide.

The Participant Handouts contains all the information and activity sheets that participants need to participate in the session and will take with them when they leave. The contents are also organized in the order they will be used in the session. Make a copy of the handouts for each participant.

Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom

Introduction to the module: The purpose of this workshop is to support teachers of English as a second language (ESL) in using assessments to determine class content and instructional practices and to provide feedback to students. Assessment of adult English language learners begins when students enter an adult ESL program: Information is collected during intake and registration processes about students' language and educational backgrounds, literacy levels in their native languages, English language and literacy levels, and goals for learning English. This information should be used to accurately place students in appropriate classes and prepare teachers for working with them. Placement assessments can be purchased (commercial products are available), based on a textbook series, or created locally to meet specific programmatic needs and language focus (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing). The types of placement assessments usually used—oral interviews, writing samples, constructed response, reading comprehension passages, and form completion—do not provide extensive diagnostic information on English language abilities, but rather portray a general description of student strengths, areas for improvement, and goals for learning English. In some adult ESL programs, standardized tests are used for placement purposes, as well as to meet the pretest/posttest accountability and reporting requirements of the funding agencies.

Once learners are placed in an appropriate class, needs assessments are used to identify the content topics, language skills, and learning goals that students would like to focus on at the beginning of a course of instruction and periodically throughout. (See the Assessing Learner Needs workshop module in *The CAELA Guide for Adult ESL Trainers* for more information.) Classroom assessments are then used throughout a course of study to guide the teacher in planning instruction that meets learners' needs and goals and to help learners assess their own progress. Through the use of performance objectives, teachers determine what the final learning outcome will be and how it will be assessed, and can then design lesson plans and instructional activities leading up to the final assessment.

This workshop begins with an overview of using and planning assessments, then presents sample performance assessment activities that use rating scales with clearly defined criteria, and then reviews learner self-assessment tools. Workshop participants are given several opportunities to practice evaluating and designing performance assessments for the classroom and are encouraged to create an action plan for applying the information from this workshop in their own classroom practice. This workshop's activities and materials are based on research about assessment for adult English language learners (see National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics, 2004; Van Duzer, 2002; Van Duzer & Berdán, 2000).

Target audience for this workshop: New and experienced teachers, tutors, and classroom aides

Goal of the workshop: To increase knowledge and skills in designing and using a variety of assessments in the adult ESL classroom to measure progress in language and literacy development

Workshop objectives for participants: At the end of the workshop, participants should be able to

- ▶ Understand classroom assessments and their place in the instructional process
- ▶ Recognize key elements in planning assessments
- ▶ Identify the role of performance objectives in planning assessments
- ▶ Develop effective assessment activities

Length of workshop: 3 hours and 30 minutes

The workshop components are as follows:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Part 1. Introductions and Warm-Up | 35 minutes |
| Part 2. Presentation | 90 minutes |
| Part 3. Practice and Application | 55 minutes |
| Part 4. Wrap-Up and Evaluation | 30 minutes |
| Total projected length of workshop | 210 minutes (3 hours and 30 minutes)* |

***Note:** This does not include a break. There should be a 15-minute break approximately halfway through the workshop—the exact time for the break will be selected by the trainer and added to the total training time.

Preparation for the workshop:

- ▶ Read “Assessments for the Classroom: Background Reading” from the Participant Handouts or the Trainer Notes.
- ▶ Make transparencies or PowerPoint slides as indicated in the Trainer Notes.
- ▶ Make a copy of the participant handouts for each participant.

Note: In the Trainer Guide, materials to be found in the Trainer Notes are indicated by TN, followed by the page number; materials to be found in the Participant Handouts are indicated by PH, followed by the page number.

Materials needed for the workshop:

- ▶ Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom: Trainer Guide
- ▶ Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom: Trainer Notes (make transparencies or PowerPoint slides as indicated in the Trainer Guide)
- ▶ Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom: Participant Handouts

References

- National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics. (2004). *Practitioner toolkit: Working with adult English language learners*. Available from www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/prac_toolkit.html
- Van Duzer, C. (2002). *Issues in accountability and assessment for adult ESL instruction*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Available from www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/accountQA.html
- Van Duzer, C., & Berdán, R. (2000). Perspectives on assessment in adult ESOL instruction. *The annual review of adult learning and literacy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Available from www.ncsall.net/?id=493

1. Introductions and Warm-Up

Purposes:

- ▶ To activate participants' prior knowledge about classroom assessments for adult ESL instruction
- ▶ To create a baseline of what people currently do to assess students and what they want to learn or improve in their assessments
- ▶ To review the agenda and objectives for this session

Time: 35 minutes

Process:

| Actions | Materials |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Introductions (2 minutes)</p> <p>Presenters introduce themselves (affiliations, experience in teaching adult ESL, etc.) and the workshop.</p> | |
| <p>2. Activate prior knowledge. (15 minutes)</p> <p>Make an overhead transparency or PowerPoint slide of the Getting Acquainted: Assessment Practices in the Classroom handout and introduce the handout. Instruct participants to answer the questions about themselves in the first column and then to work with a partner and share information. Note the reflection questions they should answer after their discussion.</p> | <p>Transparency or PowerPoint slide: Getting Acquainted: Assessment Practices in the Classroom (TN, p. 17)</p> <p>Getting Acquainted: Assessment Practices in the Classroom (PH, p. 37)</p> |

| Actions | Materials |
|--|---|
| <p>3. Create a baseline of what people do and what they want to learn. (13 minutes)</p> <p>When they have finished talking to their partner, ask participants to share their answers to Questions 3–6 with the group. Record answers on chart paper.</p> <p>Encourage participants to note the responses of others that resonate with them on their Getting Acquainted handout.</p> <p>Make sure the following points are addressed in the answer to Question 3—Assessments are important because they</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • let all the stakeholders (learners, teachers, program administrators, funders, etc.) know that language and life skills have been identified, practiced, and accomplished; • provide a way to follow learners’ progress; and • inform instruction. <p>Wrap up by telling participants that during the workshop you will refer to their responses to the questions.</p> | <p>Chart paper</p> |
| <p>4. Review the goal, objectives, and agenda points with the participants. (5 minutes)</p> <p>Workshop goal: To increase knowledge and skills in designing and using a variety of assessments in the adult ESL classroom to measure progress in language and literacy development</p> <p>Workshop objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand classroom assessments and their place in the instructional process • To recognize key elements in planning assessments • To identify the role of performance objectives in planning assessments • To develop effective assessment activities | <p>Transparency or PowerPoint slide: Workshop Goal, Objectives, and Agenda (TN, p. 18)</p> <p>Workshop Goal, Objectives, and Agenda (PH, p. 38)</p> |

2. Presentation

Purposes:

- ▶ To understand classroom assessments and their place in the instructional process
- ▶ To introduce level descriptions and understand their role in assessment
- ▶ To review performance objectives and understand their role in planning assessments
- ▶ To understand key elements in planning assessments and identify effective assessment activities
- ▶ To present examples of tools and processes for assessing language development

Time: 90 minutes

Process:

| Actions | Materials |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Understand classroom assessments and their place in the instructional process. (15 minutes)</p> <p>Tell participants to read <i>Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom: Background Reading</i>. Point out the discussion questions at the end of the reading and tell them to share their answers to these questions with a partner.</p> <p>Ask volunteers to share their answers to the questions. Then, refer to their responses to Question 3 in the warm-up activity. Look for comparisons and elaborations.</p> | <p><i>Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom: Background Reading</i> (TN, pp. 19–22; PH, pp. 39–42)</p> |

| Actions | Materials |
|--|---|
| <p>2. Introduce level descriptions and understand their role in assessment. (10 minutes)</p> <p>Refer to Question 4 in the warm-up activity—How do you know that learners are making progress? Review what participants wrote. Point out that when teachers assess students’ ability to complete a task, students need to be assessed according to their language level, not in comparison to other students.</p> <p>Ask participants what they know about the National Reporting System (NRS) level descriptors. If many are unfamiliar with the NRS descriptors, give a brief introduction to them. For background information, go to www.nrsweb.org or www.nrsonline.org.</p> <p>Instruct participants to think of one of their students, read the NRS descriptors, and identify the student’s NRS levels for speaking, listening, reading, and writing.</p> <p>Point out that the level descriptions create a baseline of what people know and can do. To know how far learners have progressed, teachers need to know where they are at the beginning of instruction.</p> <p>Tell participants that they will do several activities that focus on the level of a student of their choosing.</p> | <p>NRS Level Descriptors (TN, pp. 23–25; PH, pp. 43–45)</p> |
| <p>3. Review performance objectives and understand their role in planning assessments. (10 minutes)</p> <p>Hand out the Performance Objective worksheet. Using a transparency or PowerPoint slide of the worksheet, review what performance objectives are. Guide the discussion with the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do performance objectives help the teacher do? • What are the essential parts of a performance objective? (condition, performance, and criteria) • What is the condition here? (telephone conversation) • What is the performance? (report a child’s absence) • What are the criteria? (give the child’s name, teacher’s name or class, and reason for absence) <p>Ask participants what kinds of activities might work well in the lesson to help learners achieve this performance objective. Write participant responses on the overhead.</p> <p>Tell participants that assessment activities grow out of the performance objectives and the lesson activities. Learners are assessed on their ability to use the language taught while completing the tasks identified in a specific performance objective.</p> <p><i>Learners are assessed on how well they can perform the task.</i></p> | <p>Performance Objective (TN, p. 26; PH, p. 46)</p> <p>Transparency or PowerPoint slide: Performance Objective (Telephone the school office and report a child’s absence.) (TN, p. 26; PH, p. 46)</p> |

| Actions | Materials |
|---|--|
| <p>4. Understand key elements in planning assessments and identify effective assessment activities. (55 minutes)</p> <p>A. Key elements in planning assessments (10 minutes)</p> <p>Ask participants what kinds of assessment tasks would work well with the above performance task (e.g., role play). How do they prepare assessment tasks? What issues do they consider when developing assessment tasks?</p> <p>Use the transparency or PowerPoint slide, Planning an Assessment Task, to go over the goals of performance tasks and design considerations.</p> <p>Hand out the Planning an Assessment Task worksheet. Instruct participants to complete the task on their own. Discuss a few participants' responses. See Trainer Notes for sample responses.</p> <p>B. Sample assessment activities (30 minutes)</p> <p>Divide participants into three groups. Tell participants that they are going to review three ESL classroom activities and examine how they can be used as assessment activities.</p> <p>Distribute one reading to each group: Readings from <i>Practitioner Toolkit: Working with Adult English Language Learners</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line Dialogue • Information Gap • Conversation Grid <p>Distribute the worksheet, Sample Assessment Activities: Guiding Questions.</p> <p>Tell participants to read the description of the activity and to pay close attention to how the activity can be used as an assessment activity. They should work together asking and answering questions on the worksheet about their activity.</p> <p>Next, form new groups with one participant from each group. Instruct participants to share their instructional activity and to discuss how the activity can also be used as an assessment activity.</p> <p>Monitor the groups' discussions and answer questions. See the Trainer Notes for answers to the guiding questions.</p> | <p>Transparency or PowerPoint slide: Planning an Assessment Task (TN, p. 27)</p> <p>Planning an Assessment Task (PH, p. 47)</p> <p>Readings from <i>Practitioner Toolkit: Working with Adult English Language Learners</i>: (PH, p. 48–54)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Line Dialogue – pp. 48–49 • Information Gap – pp. 50–51 • Conversation Grid – pp. 52–54 <p>Sample Assessment Activities: Guiding Questions (TN, pp. 28–29; PH, p. 55)</p> |

| Actions | Materials |
|--|--|
| <p>5. Present examples of tools and processes for assessing language development. (15 minutes)</p> <p>Review participants’ responses to Question 5 from the warm-up activity. What dimensions of language and literacy development do they want to assess in their classes?</p> <p>Tell them that in this workshop you will focus on observation measures with rating scales, and learner self-assessments.</p> <p>Observation Measures</p> <p>Show participants the observation measures for listening and reading. Ask if they have used or created anything like this for their classroom assessments. Point out the assessment task (follow oral or written instructions to make vanilla pudding) and read the rating scale (with ease, with some support, with great difficulty, not at all). Ask participants—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the task measure what has been taught? <i>Yes. Learners are assessed on their ability to follow oral and/or written recipe instructions.</i> • Does it have a real-world application? <i>Yes. In daily life people read recipes. The structure of recipe directions can be transferred to other types of step-by-step directions.</i> • Does it allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills? <i>Yes, it does. This is a performance task where learners must make the dessert by reading or hearing and following the directions.</i> <p>Next, ask them what the rating criteria—<i>with ease, with some support, with great difficulty, and not at all</i>—mean. (with ease = learners can comprehend and read instructions without asking questions and looking terribly puzzled; with some support = learners occasionally have to have a word provided, a sentence modeled, or help from peers; with great difficulty = learners need to consult a dictionary, ask peers for translation, or constantly observe others)</p> <p>Wrap up by telling participants that it is very important that when they select criteria, they know what the criteria mean. They must define their criteria.</p> | <p>Transparencies or PowerPoint slides from <i>Assessing Success in Family Literacy and Adult ESL</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation Measure for Listening and Reading (TN, p. 30) <p>Handouts from <i>Assessing Success in Family Literacy and Adult ESL</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation Measure for Listening and Reading (PH, p. 56) |

| Actions | Materials |
|---|--|
| <p>Student Self-Assessments</p> <p>Tell participants that the discussions are focused on observation measures with rating scales that teachers can use, but that it is important for students to have opportunities to engage in self-assessments as well. Self-assessments should be part of a classroom assessment package. Using an overhead, show an example of a can-do list for self-assessment from <i>Assessing Success in Family Literacy and Adult ESL</i>. Discuss the life-skill tasks in the first column. Point out that these reflect what many learners want to be able to do in English. Discuss the rating scale, which describes a range of performances from <i>Can do it easily</i> to <i>Can't do it</i>.</p> <p>Discuss can-do lists. Highlight the following. Can-do lists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable learners to reflect on what they can and cannot do and what they need to practice. • Allow learners to indicate the degree of difficulty with daily communication tasks. • Can be adapted to assess knowledge and skills for any curriculum topic. Brainstorm with participants about other topic areas (e.g., health, finding employment, technology). • Can act as progress indicators if used several times during the instructional cycle. <p>Wrap up by reviewing what was discussed and learned during the presentation part of the workshop.</p> | <p>Transparency or PowerPoint slide from <i>Assessing Success in Family Literacy and Adult ESL</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can-Do List for Self-Assessment (TN, p. 31) <p>Handout from <i>Assessing Success in Family Literacy and Adult ESL</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can-Do List for Self-Assessment (PH, p. 57) |

3. Practice and Application

Purpose:

- ▶ To apply the concepts learned in the presentation of new material and increase skills in developing classroom assessments

Time: 55 minutes

Process:

| Actions | Materials |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Apply the concepts learned in the presentation of new material and increase skills in developing classroom assessments.</p> <p>A. Practice Activity 1 (25 minutes)</p> <p>Tell participants to think about the student for whom, in Part 2 of the workshop, they identified a language proficiency level using the NRS level descriptors.</p> <p>Group participants into small groups by NRS level descriptor. If groups are large, divide participants so that no more than four or five participants are in each group.</p> <p>Hand out the Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 1 worksheet and go over the directions for the task. Hand out a transparency or PowerPoint slide and marker to each group and tell participants to assign one group member to be the scribe and one to be the reporter. Each group will have up to 2 minutes to share its plans. Check comprehension of the task. Explain that they will use the Presentation Assessment Checklist to evaluate each group’s assessment task.</p> <p>Give groups 12 minutes to complete the task. Use the remainder of the time to have groups share their plans and to provide feedback on their plans.</p> | <p>Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 1 (TN, p. 32; PH, p. 58)</p> <p>Transparency or PowerPoint slide: Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 1 and overhead marker for each group of participants</p> <p>Presentation Assessment Checklist (TN, p. 33; PH, p. 59)</p> |

| Actions | Materials |
|---|--|
| <p>B. Practice Activity 2 (30 minutes)</p> <p>Participants should work in the same groups.</p> <p>Hand out the Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 2 worksheet and go over the directions for the task. Hand out another transparency or PowerPoint slide to each group. Tell participants to assign a group member to be the scribe and another to be the reporter. Each group will have up to 3 minutes to share its plans. Check comprehension of the task. Explain that they will use the Presentation Assessment Checklist to evaluate each group's assessment task.</p> <p>Give groups 20 minutes to complete the task. Use the remainder of the time to have groups share their plans and to provide feedback on their plans.</p> <p>Note: If there is a large group of participants, you can have half of the groups present their work in Practice Activity 1 and the other half present their work in Practice Activity 2.</p> <p>Tell participants that an effective way of planning instruction is to first plan what the assessment will be. Once you know the outcomes you want to achieve, you can easily plan how to achieve them.</p> | <p>Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 2 (TN, pp. 34–35; PH, pp. 60–61)</p> <p>Transparency or PowerPoint slide: Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 2 and overhead marker for each group of participants.</p> <p>Presentation Assessment Checklist (if additional copies are needed) (TN, p. 33; PH, p. 59)</p> |

4. Wrap-Up and Evaluation

Purposes:

- ▶ To reflect on and assess how well participants understood concepts addressed in the workshop
- ▶ To discuss extension activities and to introduce participants to the Trainer Guide for the workshop

Time: 30 minutes

Process:

| Actions | Materials |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Reflect on and assess how well participants understood concepts addressed in the workshop. (15 minutes)</p> <p>Observe and provide appropriate feedback on the presentations of assessment activities.</p> <p>Return to responses to Question 6 in the warm-up activity and ask participants to think about the workshop and what questions have been answered for them. Discuss ways to continue learning about classroom assessments.</p> <p>Ask a few participants to share what they will focus on in using classroom assessments when they return to their programs.</p> | <p>Chart with participant responses to Question 6 of the warm-up activity.</p> |
| <p>2. Discuss extension activities and introduce participants to the Trainer Guide for the workshop. (15 minutes)</p> <p>Hand out the Action Plan worksheet and instruct participants to complete the four statements. Ask for volunteers to share their statements. Brainstorm about things participants can do to continue building their skills in designing classroom assessments.</p> <p>Review the Trainer Guide with the participants.</p> <p>Ask participants to complete the Workshop Evaluation form.</p> | <p>Handout: My Action Plan worksheet (PH, p. 62)</p> <p>Workshop Evaluation Form (PH, p. 63)</p> |

Getting Acquainted: Assessment Practices in the Classroom

Directions:

Answer the following questions for yourself. Next, find a partner and share your responses with each other. Then, reflect on the questions below.

| | You | Your Partner |
|---|-----|--------------|
| 1. Where do you teach? | | |
| 2. What level(s) do you teach? | | |
| 3. Why is assessment an essential part of the instructional process? | | |
| 4. How do you know that learners are making progress? What is evidence of progress in language and literacy development? | | |
| 5. What dimensions of language and literacy do you assess? What types of assessment tools do you use in your classes? | | |
| 6. What are some specific issues/questions you have regarding classroom assessment? | | |

Reflection Questions:

Did you find similarities and differences in your assessment practices? Did the exchange bring up any important questions, thoughts, or ideas for you?

Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom

Workshop Goal, Objectives, and Agenda

Goal:

To increase knowledge and skills in designing and using a variety of assessments in the adult ESL classroom to measure learner progress in language and literacy development

Objectives:

- ▶ To understand classroom assessments and their place in the instructional process
- ▶ To recognize key elements in planning assessments
- ▶ To identify the role of performance objectives in planning assessments
- ▶ To develop effective assessment activities

Agenda:

- I. Introduction and Warm-Up
- II. Presentation
- III. Practice and Application
- IV. Wrap-Up and Evaluation

Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom

Background Reading

Learner assessments are used in adult ESL programs for many purposes: to place learners in appropriate instructional levels and classes, to measure their progress and motivate them to advance to higher levels, to qualify them to enroll in academic or job training programs, to document program effectiveness, and to demonstrate learner gains to meet accountability requirements. Assessments also are used throughout a program to determine learners' goals and needs and to help learners assess their own progress. To accomplish these purposes, programs often use a variety of assessments—both standardized and classroom measures.

Assessment of adult English language learners begins when students enter an adult ESL program: Information is collected during intake and registration processes about students' language and educational backgrounds, literacy levels in their native languages, English language and literacy levels, and goals for learning English. This information should be used to accurately place students in appropriate classes and prepare teachers for working with them. Placement assessments can be purchased (commercial products are available), based on a textbook series, or created locally to meet specific programmatic needs and language focus (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing). The types of placement assessments usually used—oral interviews, writing samples, constructed response, reading comprehension passages, and form completion—do not provide extensive diagnostic information on English language abilities, but rather portray a general description of student strengths, areas for improvement, and goals for learning English. In some adult ESL programs, standardized tests are used for placement purposes, as well as to meet the pretest/posttest accountability and reporting requirements of the funding agencies.

Once learners are placed in an appropriate class, formal needs assessments are conducted to identify the content topics, language skills, and learning goals that students would like to focus on at the beginning of a course of instruction and periodically throughout. Classroom assessments are then used throughout a course of study to guide the teacher in planning instruction that meets learners' needs and goals and to help learners assess their own progress. Through the use of performance objectives, teachers determine what the final learning outcome will be and how it will be assessed, and can then design lesson plans and instructional activities leading up to the final assessment.

Classroom assessments include surveys, interviews, checklists, observations, teacher-developed tests, learner self-assessments, portfolios, and performance-based tests (Van Duzer, 2002). These assessments allow program administrators and teachers to learn what adults need and want to learn (in a needs assessment) and monitor their learning from classroom-based activities (in ongoing assessment). Portfolios or collections of individuals' work can include such items as book reports, notes from interviews, learners' reflection on their progress, writing samples, data from performance-based assessments, and scores on standardized tests. From program-developed performance-based tests, instructors, administrators, and learners can get information about how a learner uses English to accomplish different tasks. Skills such as reading a chart or locating information on a schedule can be related to actual situations that learners might encounter. Authentic materials such as job applications, pay stubs, and union contracts are often used to assess learner knowledge and skills in workplace programs (Holt & Van Duzer, 2000).

Principles of Effective Assessment

For both standardized and classroom assessments, application of the following principles will produce effective assessment procedures:

1. Clearly identify the purpose of the assessment (why the learners are being assessed) and what learning is to be assessed (e.g., increased speaking proficiency).
2. Select assessment instruments and procedures that match the learning goals of the program (e.g., an oral interview to show progress in speaking skills, writing samples to show progress in writing) and that engage learners so they are interested and will strive to do their best.
3. Whenever possible, use multiple measures to present a more complete picture of what has been learned.
4. Ensure that adequate resources are available to carry out the assessments (e.g., enough materials, comfortable environment, adequately trained administrators and scorers).
5. Be aware of the limitations of the assessments selected.
6. Remember that assessment is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Share assessment results with learners and instructors, as well as administrative staff and funders.

Note: From National Center for Family Literacy & National Center for ESL Literacy. (2004). *Practitioner toolkit: Working with adult English language learners*. Washington, DC: National Center for Family Literacy. Available from www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/elltoolkit/CombinedFiles.pdf

Performance Assessment

There is a direct link between instruction and assessment. Performance assessment requires learners to use prior knowledge and recent learning to accomplish tasks that demonstrate what they know and can do. Examples of performance assessment tasks include *oral or written reports* (e.g., on how to become a citizen); *projects* (e.g., researching, producing, and distributing a booklet on recreational opportunities available in the community); and *exhibitions or demonstrations* (e.g., a poster depicting the steps to becoming a U.S. citizen). A variety of performance assessments provide a more complete picture of a learner's abilities than can be gathered from performance on a pencil-and-paper standardized test.

For adult ESL classes, performance assessment reflects current thought about second language acquisition: Learners acquire language as they use it in social interactions to accomplish purposeful tasks (e.g., finding information or applying for a job). The performance may be assessed simply by documenting the successful completion of the task or by the use of rubrics designed to assess various dimensions of carrying out the task (e.g., rating oral presentation skills on a scale of 1–5). Both instructors and learners can be involved in the development of evaluation guidelines and in the evaluation procedure itself (Van Duzer, 2002; Van Duzer & Berdán, 2000).

Conclusion

Assessments are used in the classroom to find out what students know and can do. They are program based and learner centered. They must be part of the overall learning experience and not just a single procedure. They measure what has been taught and learned and often simulate real-world tasks. Finally, they provide feedback that will inform instruction.

Discussion

Discuss the following questions with a partner in a small group.

1. Why do teachers use assessments in the classroom?

To measure learners' progress and motivate them to advance to higher levels, to demonstrate learners' gains, to determine learners' goals and needs, and to help learners assess their own progress.

2. Why do you think it is important to use multiple assessment measures?

It is important to measure progress for a variety of purposes. Standardized tests can provide only part of the information necessary to document learner progress.

3. What is your experience with using classroom assessments?

Responses will vary.

Reading Resources

Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.). (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL*. McHenry, IL & Washington, DC: Delta Systems & Center for Applied Linguistics.

Moss, D., & Van Duzer, C. (1998). *Project-based learning for adult English language learners*. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. Available from www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/ProjBase.html

National Center for ESL Literacy Education. (2001). *CAELA resource collections: Assessment and evaluation in adult ESL*. Washington, DC: Author. Available from www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/collections/assessment.html

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Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Available from www.nclae.gwu.edu/pubs/resource/effectiveness

Van Duzer, C. (2002). *Issues in accountability and assessment for adult ESL instruction*. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. Available from www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/accountQA.html

Van Duzer, C., & Berdán, R. (2000). Perspectives on assessment in adult ESOL instruction. In *The annual review of adult learning and literacy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Available from www.ncsall.net/?id=493

Table 1. National Reporting System Functioning Level Table

Outcome Measures Definitions
Effective July 1, 2006

| Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Literacy Level | Listening and Speaking | Basic Reading and Writing | Functional and Workplace Skills |
| <p>Beginning ESL Literacy</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 180 and below Listening: 180 and below</p> <p>Oral BEST: 0–15 (SPL 0–1)</p> <p>BEST Plus: 400 and below (SPL 0–1)</p> <p>BEST Literacy: 0–7 (SPL 0–1)</p> | <p>Individual cannot speak or understand English, or understands only isolated words or phrases.</p> | <p>Individual has no or minimal reading or writing skills in any language. May have little or no comprehension of how print corresponds to spoken language and may have difficulty using a writing instrument.</p> | <p>Individual functions minimally or not at all in English and can communicate only through gestures or a few isolated words, such as name and other personal information; may recognize only common signs or symbols (e.g., stop sign, product logos); can handle only very routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral or written communication in English. There is no knowledge or use of computers or technology.</p> |
| <p>Low Beginning ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 181–190 Listening: 181–190 Writing: 136–145</p> <p>Oral BEST: 16–28 (SPL 2)</p> <p>BEST Plus: 401–417 (SPL 2)</p> <p>BEST Literacy: 8–35 (SPL 2)</p> | <p>Individual can understand basic greetings, simple phrases, and commands. Can understand simple questions related to personal information, spoken slowly and with repetition. Understands a limited number of words related to immediate needs and can respond with simple learned phrases to some common questions related to routine survival situations. Speaks slowly and with difficulty. Demonstrates little or no control over grammar.</p> | <p>Individual can read numbers and letters and some common sight words. May be able to sound out simple words. Can read and write some familiar words and phrases, but has a limited understanding of connected prose in English. Can write basic personal information (e.g., name, address, telephone number) and can complete simple forms that elicit this information.</p> | <p>Individual functions with difficulty in social situations and in situations related to immediate needs. Can provide limited personal information on simple forms, and can read very simple common forms of print found in the home and environment, such as product names. Can handle routine entry-level jobs that require very simple written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited knowledge and experience with computers.</p> |

Table 1. National Reporting System Functioning Level Table (Continued)

Outcome Measures Definitions
Effective July 1, 2006

| Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Literacy Level | Listening and Speaking | Basic Reading and Writing | Functional and Workplace Skills |
| <p>High Beginning ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 191–200 Listening: 191–200 Writing: 146–200</p> <p>Oral BEST: 29–41 (SPL 3) BEST Plus: 418–438 (SPL 3) BEST Literacy: 36–46 (SPL 3)</p> | <p>Individual can understand common words, simple phrases, and sentences containing familiar vocabulary, spoken slowly with some repetition. Individual can respond to simple questions about personal everyday activities and can express immediate needs, using simple learned phrases or short sentences. Shows limited control of grammar.</p> | <p>Individual can read most sight words and many other common words. Can read familiar phrases and simple sentences, but has a limited understanding of connected prose and may need frequent rereading.</p> <p>Individual can write some simple sentences with limited vocabulary. Meaning may be unclear. Writing shows very little control of basic grammar, capitalization, and punctuation and has many spelling errors.</p> | <p>Individual can function in some situations related to immediate needs and in familiar social situations. Can provide basic personal information on simple forms and recognizes simple common forms of print found in the home, workplace, and community. Can handle routine entry-level jobs requiring basic written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited knowledge or experience using computers.</p> |
| <p>Low Intermediate ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 201–210 Listening: 201–210 Writing: 201–225</p> <p>Oral BEST: 42–50 (SPL 4) BEST Plus: 439–472 (SPL 4) BEST Literacy: 47–53 (SPL 5)</p> | <p>Individual can understand simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly with frequent repetition; can ask and respond to questions using such phrases; can express basic survival needs and participate in some routine social conversations, although with some difficulty, and has some control of basic grammar.</p> | <p>Individual can read simple material on familiar subjects and comprehend simple and compound sentences in single or linked paragraphs containing a familiar vocabulary; can write simple notes and messages on familiar situations, but lacks clarity and focus. Sentence structure lacks variety but shows some control of basic grammar (e.g., present and past tense) and consistent use of punctuation (e.g., periods, capitalization).</p> | <p>Individual can interpret simple directions and schedules, signs, and maps; can fill out simple forms but needs support on some documents that are not simplified; and can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve some written or oral English communication but in which job tasks can be demonstrated. Individual can use simple computer programs and can perform a sequence of routine tasks given directions using technology (e.g., fax machine, computer).</p> |

Table 1. National Reporting System Functioning Level Table (Continued)

Outcome Measures Definitions
Effective July 1, 2006

| Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Literacy Level | Listening and Speaking | Basic Reading and Writing | Functional and Workplace Skills |
| <p>High Intermediate ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 211–220 Listening: 211–220 Writing: 226–242</p> <p>Oral BEST: 51–57 (SPL 5)</p> <p>BEST Plus: 473–506 (SPL 5)</p> <p>BEST Literacy: 54–65 (SPL 6)</p> | <p>Individual can understand learned phrases and short new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly and with some repetition; can communicate basic survival needs with some help; can participate in conversation in limited social situations and use new phrases with hesitation; and relies on description and concrete terms. There is inconsistent control of more complex grammar.</p> | <p>Individual can read text on familiar subjects that have a simple and clear underlying structure (e.g., clear main idea, chronological order); can use context to determine meaning; can interpret actions required in specific written directions; can write simple paragraphs with main idea and supporting details on familiar topics (e.g., daily activities, personal issues) by recombining learned vocabulary and structures; and can self-edit for spelling and punctuation errors.</p> | <p>Individual can meet basic survival and social needs, can follow some simple oral and written instruction, and has some ability to communicate on the telephone on familiar subjects; can write messages and notes related to basic needs; can complete basic medical forms and job applications; and can handle jobs that involve basic oral instructions and written communication in tasks that can be clarified orally. Individual can work with or learn basic computer software, such as word processing, and can follow simple instructions for using technology.</p> |
| <p>Advanced ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 221–235 Listening: 221–235 Writing: 243–260</p> <p>Oral BEST: 58–64 (SPL 6)</p> <p>BEST Plus: 507–540 (SPL 6)</p> <p>BEST Literacy: 66 and above (SPL 7)</p> <p><i>Exit Criteria:</i></p> <p>CASAS Reading and Listening: 236 and above</p> <p>CASAS Writing: 261 and above</p> <p>Oral BEST: 65 and above (SPL 7)</p> <p>BEST Plus: 541 and above (SPL 7)</p> | <p>Individual can understand and communicate in a variety of contexts related to daily life and work. Can understand and participate in conversation on a variety of everyday subjects, including some unfamiliar vocabulary, but may need repetition or rewording. Can clarify own or others' meaning by rewording. Can understand the main points of simple discussions and informational communication in familiar contexts. Shows some ability to go beyond learned patterns and construct new sentences. Shows control of basic grammar, but has difficulty using more complex structures. Has some basic fluency of speech.</p> | <p>Individual can read moderately complex text related to life roles and descriptions and narratives from authentic materials on familiar subjects. Uses context and word analysis skills to understand vocabulary, and uses multiple strategies to understand unfamiliar texts. Can make inferences, predictions, and compare and contrast information in familiar texts. Individual can write multiparagraph text (e.g., organizes and develops ideas with clear introduction, body, and conclusion), using some complex grammar and a variety of sentence structures. Makes some grammar and spelling errors. Uses a range of vocabulary.</p> | <p>Individual can function independently to meet most survival needs and to use English in routine social and work situations. Can communicate on the telephone on familiar subjects. Understands radio and television on familiar topics. Can interpret routine charts, tables, and graphs, and can complete forms and handle work demands that require nontechnical oral and written instructions and routine interaction with the public. Individual can use common software, learn new basic applications, and select the correct basic technology in familiar situations.</p> |

CASAS: Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems; BEST: Basic English Skills Test; SPL: Student Performance Level.
Note: From National Reporting System for Adult Education: www.nrsweb.org/

Performance Objective

Telephone the school office to report a child's absence. Give the name of the child, the child's teacher or class, and the reason for the absence.

Notes:

Note: From National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics. (2004). *Practitioner toolkit: Working with adult English language learners*. Louisville, KY & Washington, DC: Author. Available from www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/prac_toolkit.html

Planning an Assessment Task

The goal of performance tasks is to acquire evidence that students have achieved the knowledge and skills to complete the learning objective.

When designing a performance task, ask yourself—

- ▶ Does the task measure what has been taught?
- ▶ Does the task mirror a real-world application of the knowledge and skills?
- ▶ Does the task allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills?

Directions

Read the learning objectives and the assessment tasks below. Decide whether or not they are well designed based on the criteria above. Discuss your answers with a partner.

Learning Objective: Telephone the school office to report a child's absence. Give the name of the child, the child's teacher or class, and the reason for the absence.

Performance task: *Give students a contact assignment to call the teacher's voice mail and leave a message; or students can record a message, without a script, using a tape recorder.*

| | Yes | No | Because |
|--|-----|----|---|
| Does it measure what has been taught? | X | | The students need to give required information orally. |
| Does it mirror real-world problems? | X | | Every parent with school-age children needs to do this. |
| Can students demonstrate their knowledge and skills? | X | | The task simulates a real-life task. |

Learning Objective: Given visuals of housing problems, students will call and report a problem, request repairs, and make an appointment for repairs.

Performance task: *Students will write a letter to the landlord making a complaint about the housing problems.*

| | Yes | No | Because |
|--|-----|----|---|
| Does it measure what has been taught? | | X | This is an oral skills objective. Writing complaint letters requires other skills not addressed in this learning objective. |
| Does it mirror real-world problems? | X | | There are times when writing a complaint letter is appropriate. |
| Can students demonstrate their knowledge and skills? | | X | The task does not allow student to demonstrate the ability to use language to report a problem, request repairs, and make an appointment. |

Directions

Describe another task for this learning objective. Share it with a partner. Your partner will check that it meets the above criteria. Check your partners work.

| | Yes | No | Because |
|--|-----|----|---------|
| Does it measure what has been taught? | | | |
| Does it mirror real-world problems? | | | |
| Can students demonstrate their knowledge and skills? | | | |

Sample Assessment Activities: Guiding Questions

Line Dialogue

1. What is the purpose of this activity?

Line dialogues give students opportunities for repeated practice using targeted language in short dialogues that they have been taught.

2. How does a line dialogue work?

Students stand in two lines facing each other. In Line A, each person holds a cue card and asks the same question to every student in Line B. The people in Line B listen to the question, look at the cue cards shown to them by the person in Line A, and respond to the question. After each question, students in Line B move down the line. The last person in Line B moves to the beginning of the line. All pairs talk at once.

3. How can it be used as an assessment activity?

Because of the nature of line dialogue activities, the teacher can stand unobtrusively near the lines of students and observe pairs ask and answer questions using the target language that has been taught. Line dialogue assessment tasks can focus on vocabulary knowledge, question formation, and clarification skills.

Information Gap

1. What is the purpose of this activity?

Learners share information by asking and answering questions. In one-way gap activities, one learner has all the information. In two-way gap activities, both learners have information and must share it to complete a task.

2. How do information gap activities work?

Vocabulary and structures used in the gap activities are pretaught. Students must be familiar with question-and-answer formulas. The teacher creates a handout based on the information, language structures, and/or vocabulary that students have been working on. The teacher makes two copies. Then the teacher deletes some information from one copy of the worksheet (or different information from both worksheets). Students work in pairs, and each person gets a different worksheet. Students ask and answer questions to complete their worksheet.

3. How can it be used as an assessment activity?

The teacher can observe pairs of students asking for and giving information. The teacher can observe listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills; vocabulary knowledge; and language structures.

Conversation Grid

1. What is the purpose of this activity?

Conversation grid activities give students repeated practice with language structures, question formation, vocabulary, and cultural aspects related to the topic. Students ask the same questions to several people and record answers on the grid.

2. How does a conversation grid activity work?

The teacher creates a grid with between three and five columns and as many rows as the teacher wants students to practice. Each column has a question that has been pretaught. The teacher models the task with one or two students, asking them the questions and recording their answers on the grid. Students receive their own copies of the grid and then talk to their classmates and complete their grids.

Sample conversation grid

| What is your first name? | What is your last name? | Where are you from? |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| | | |
| | | |

3. How can it be used as an assessment activity?

The teacher can observe students conducting interviews and writing responses. The teacher can also participate. Communicative abilities; vocabulary knowledge; listening, speaking, and writing skills; and clarification skills can be observed and assessed.

Figure 1. Observation Measure for Listening and Reading

Type of assessment: Observation measure.

Purpose: To assess listening and reading skills.

Method: After learners listen to or read instructions, staff members assess their performance and check the appropriate box in the chart.

For example: After learning how to make instant chocolate pudding for a class party, learners are asked to follow oral or written instructions for making vanilla pudding (familiar instructions) and gelatin dessert (new instructions).

Learners who can comprehend and read instructions without asking questions or looking terribly puzzled are rated “With ease.” Those who occasionally ask to have a word provided, a sentence modeled, or seek help from peers are rated “With some support.” Learners who need to consult a dictionary, ask peers for translation, or constantly observe others are checked “With great difficulty.”

| | Receptive skills | With ease | With some support | With great difficulty | Not at all |
|-----------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Listening | Follows familiar instructions | | | | |
| | Follows new instructions | | | | |
| Reading | Reads familiar instructions | | | | |
| | Reads new instructions | | | | |

Note: From Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.) (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL*. McHenry, IL & Washington, DC: Delta Systems & Center for Applied Linguistics.

Figure 2. Can-Do List for Self-Assessment

Put a checkmark (✓) in the box that best describes you (one ✓ for each row).

| Here's what I can do. | I can do this. No problem. | I do OK most of the time, except when things are complicated. | This is a little difficult for me, but I can do it with some help from others. | This is very difficult for me. I can only do it with a lot of help from others. | I can't do this. No way. It's much too difficult. |
|---|----------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Talk about my country and my city with a friend or neighbor | | | | | |
| Ask for directions on the street or ask where something is in a store | | | | | |
| Ask someone to speak more slowly or to say things in a different way | | | | | |
| Fill out a form (name, birth-date, address, phone) | | | | | |
| Explain about myself and my work in a job interview | | | | | |
| Understand the notes that my child's teacher sends home from school | | | | | |
| Figure out my phone bill or electricity bill | | | | | |
| Shop for food and clothes. | | | | | |
| Explain to the doctor in detail what's wrong with me | | | | | |
| Pick a story in the newspaper and read it | | | | | |
| Understand the news on TV | | | | | |

Note: From Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.) (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL*. McHenry, IL & Washington, DC: Delta Systems & Center for Applied Linguistics.

Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 1

Directions

1. Think about the students whose levels you identified using the NRS level descriptions.
2. Use the following learning objective to complete the task:

Telephone the school office to report a child's absence. Give the name of the child, the child's teacher or class, and the reason for the absence.

3. Review the Planning an Assessment Task worksheet you completed earlier.
4. Complete the planning sheet below.

Performance Task

Describe the assessment task you will use. *Performance tasks should simulate real-world tasks, be level appropriate, and provide students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills.*

Observation Measure

What criteria will you use to evaluate performances?

What rating scale will you use to measure performances?

Presentation Assessment Checklist

| Group 1 | Group 2 |
|--|--|
| <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear | <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear |
| Group 3 | Group 4 |
| <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear | <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear |
| Group 5 | Group 6 |
| <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear | <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear |

Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 2

Directions

1. Think about the students whose levels you identified using the NRS level descriptions.
2. Use one of the learning objectives on the next page to complete the task.
3. Review the Planning an Assessment Task worksheet you completed earlier and the ESL activity descriptions.
4. Complete the planning sheet below.

Topic: _____

Proficiency level: _____

Learning objective: _____

The desired result of this objective is that

Therefore, I need evidence that students can

So, my assessment task needs to include some things like

Performance Task

Describe the assessment task you will use.

Observation Measure

What criteria will you use to evaluate performances?

What rating scale will you use to measure performances?

Learning Objectives: Practice Activity 2

1. NRS Level: Beginning ESL Literacy

Identify key dates on a child's school calendar, including holidays, parent/teacher conferences, and report card dates.

2. NRS Level: High Beginning ESL

Schedule a doctor's appointment over the telephone. State the reason for the visit, provide personal information, and set the date and time for the appointment.

3. NRS Level: Low Intermediate ESL

Complete a job application, including personal identification, education, and work history.

Notes

Getting Acquainted: Assessment Practices in the Classroom

Directions:

Answer the following questions for yourself. Next, find a partner and share your responses with each other. Then, reflect on the questions below.

| | You | Your Partner |
|---|-----|--------------|
| 1. Where do you teach? | | |
| 2. What level(s) do you teach? | | |
| 3. Why is assessment an essential part of the instructional process? | | |
| 4. How do you know that learners are making progress? What is evidence of progress in language and literacy development? | | |
| 5. What dimensions of language and literacy do you assess? What types of assessment tools do you use in your classes? | | |
| 6. What are some specific issues/questions you have regarding classroom assessment? | | |

Reflection Questions:

Did you find similarities and differences in your assessment practices? Did the exchange bring up any important questions, thoughts, or ideas for you?

Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom

Workshop Goal, Objectives, and Agenda

Goal:

To increase knowledge and skills in designing and using a variety of assessments in the adult ESL classroom to measure learner progress in language and literacy development

Objectives:

- ▶ To understand classroom assessments and their place in the instructional process
- ▶ To recognize key elements in planning assessments
- ▶ To identify the role of performance objectives in planning assessments
- ▶ To develop effective assessment activities

Agenda:

- I. Introduction and Warm-Up
- II. Presentation
- III. Practice and Application
- IV. Wrap-Up and Evaluation

Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom

Background Reading

Learner assessments are used in adult ESL programs for many purposes: to place learners in appropriate instructional levels and classes, to measure their progress and motivate them to advance to higher levels, to qualify them to enroll in academic or job training programs, to document program effectiveness, and to demonstrate learner gains to meet accountability requirements. Assessments also are used throughout a program to determine learners' goals and needs and to help learners assess their own progress. To accomplish these purposes, programs often use a variety of assessments—both standardized and classroom measures.

Assessment of adult English language learners begins when students enter an adult ESL program: Information is collected during intake and registration processes about students' language and educational backgrounds, literacy levels in their native languages, English language and literacy levels, and goals for learning English. This information should be used to accurately place students in appropriate classes and prepare teachers for working with them. Placement assessments can be purchased (commercial products are available), based on a textbook series, or created locally to meet specific programmatic needs and language focus (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing). The types of placement assessments usually used—oral interviews, writing samples, constructed response, reading comprehension passages, and form completion—do not provide extensive diagnostic information on English language abilities, but rather portray a general description of student strengths, areas for improvement, and goals for learning English. In some adult ESL programs, standardized tests are used for placement purposes, as well as to meet the pretest/posttest accountability and reporting requirements of the funding agencies.

Once learners are placed in an appropriate class, formal needs assessments are conducted to identify the content topics, language skills, and learning goals that students would like to focus on at the beginning of a course of instruction and periodically throughout. Classroom assessments are then used throughout a course of study to guide the teacher in planning instruction that meets learners' needs and goals and to help learners assess their own progress. Through the use of performance objectives, teachers determine what the final learning outcome will be and how it will be assessed, and can then design lesson plans and instructional activities leading up to the final assessment.

Classroom assessments include surveys, interviews, checklists, observations, teacher-developed tests, learner self-assessments, portfolios, and performance-based tests (Van Duzer, 2002). These assessments allow program administrators and teachers to learn what adults need and want to learn (in a needs assessment) and monitor their learning from classroom-based activities (in ongoing assessment). Portfolios or collections of individuals' work can include such items as book reports, notes from interviews, learners' reflection on their progress, writing samples, data from performance-based assessments, and scores on standardized tests. From program-developed performance-based tests, instructors, administrators, and learners can get information about how a learner uses English to accomplish different tasks. Skills such as reading a chart or locating information on a schedule can be related to actual situations that learners might encounter. Authentic materials such as job applications, pay stubs, and union contracts are often used to assess learner knowledge and skills in workplace programs (Holt & Van Duzer, 2000).

Principles of Effective Assessment

For both standardized and classroom assessments, application of the following principles will produce effective assessment procedures:

1. Clearly identify the purpose of the assessment (why the learners are being assessed) and what learning is to be assessed (e.g., increased speaking proficiency).
2. Select assessment instruments and procedures that match the learning goals of the program (e.g., an oral interview to show progress in speaking skills, writing samples to show progress in writing) and that engage learners so they are interested and will strive to do their best.
3. Whenever possible, use multiple measures to present a more complete picture of what has been learned.
4. Ensure that adequate resources are available to carry out the assessments (e.g., enough materials, comfortable environment, adequately trained administrators and scorers).
5. Be aware of the limitations of the assessments selected.
6. Remember that assessment is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. Share assessment results with learners and instructors, as well as administrative staff and funders.

Note: From National Center for Family Literacy & National Center for ESL Literacy. (2004). *Practitioner toolkit: Working with adult English language learners*. Louisville, KY & Washington, DC: National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics. Available from www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/elltoolkit/CombinedFiles1.pdf

Performance Assessment

There is a direct link between instruction and assessment. Performance assessment requires learners to use prior knowledge and recent learning to accomplish tasks that demonstrate what they know and can do. Examples of performance assessment tasks include *oral or written reports* (e.g., on how to become a citizen); *projects* (e.g., researching, producing, and distributing a booklet on recreational opportunities available in the community); and *exhibitions or demonstrations* (e.g., a poster depicting the steps to becoming a U.S. citizen). A variety of performance assessments provide a more complete picture of a learner's abilities than can be gathered from performance on a pencil-and-paper standardized test.

For adult ESL classes, performance assessment reflects current thought about second language acquisition: Learners acquire language as they use it in social interactions to accomplish purposeful tasks (e.g., finding information or applying for a job). The performance may be assessed simply by documenting the successful completion of the task or by the use of rubrics designed to assess various dimensions of carrying out the task (e.g., rating oral presentation skills on a scale of 1–5). Both instructors and learners can be involved in the development of evaluation guidelines and in the evaluation procedure itself (Van Duzer, 2002; Van Duzer & Berdán, 2000).

Conclusion

Assessments are used in the classroom to find out what students know and can do. They are program based and learner centered. They must be part of the overall learning experience and not just a single procedure. They measure what has been taught and learned and often simulate real-world tasks. Finally, they provide feedback that will inform instruction.

Discussion

Discuss the following questions with a partner in a small group.

1. Why do teachers use assessments in the classroom?

2. Why do you think it is important to use multiple assessment measures?

3. What is your experience with using classroom assessments?

Reading Resources

Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.). (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL*. McHenry, IL & Washington, DC: Delta Systems & Center for Applied Linguistics.

Moss, D., & Van Duzer, C. (1998). *Project-based learning for adult English language learners*. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. Available from www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/ProjBase.html

National Center for ESL Literacy Education. (2001). *CAELA resource collections: Assessment and evaluation in adult ESL*. Washington, DC: Author. Available from www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/collections/assessment.html

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- Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. (1997). *School effectiveness for language minority students*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Available from www.ncele.gwu.edu/pubs/resource/effectiveness
- Van Duzer, C. (2002). *Issues in accountability and assessment for adult ESL instruction*. Washington, DC: National Center for ESL Literacy Education. Available from www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/accountQA.html
- Van Duzer, C., & Berdán, R. (2000). Perspectives on assessment in adult ESOL instruction. In *The annual review of adult learning and literacy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Available from www.ncsall.net/?id=493

Table 1. National Reporting System Functioning Level Table

Outcome Measures Definitions
Effective July 1, 2006

| Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Literacy Level | Listening and Speaking | Basic Reading and Writing | Functional and Workplace Skills |
| <p>Beginning ESL Literacy</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 180 and below Listening: 180 and below</p> <p>Oral BEST: 0–15 (SPL 0–1)</p> <p>BEST Plus: 400 and below (SPL 0–1)</p> <p>BEST Literacy: 0–7 (SPL 0–1)</p> | <p>Individual cannot speak or understand English, or understands only isolated words or phrases.</p> | <p>Individual has no or minimal reading or writing skills in any language. May have little or no comprehension of how print corresponds to spoken language and may have difficulty using a writing instrument.</p> | <p>Individual functions minimally or not at all in English and can communicate only through gestures or a few isolated words, such as name and other personal information; may recognize only common signs or symbols (e.g., stop sign, product logos); can handle only very routine entry-level jobs that do not require oral or written communication in English. There is no knowledge or use of computers or technology.</p> |
| <p>Low Beginning ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 181–190 Listening: 181–190 Writing: 136–145</p> <p>Oral BEST: 16–28 (SPL 2)</p> <p>BEST Plus: 401–417 (SPL 2)</p> <p>BEST Literacy: 8–35 (SPL 2)</p> | <p>Individual can understand basic greetings, simple phrases, and commands. Can understand simple questions related to personal information, spoken slowly and with repetition. Understands a limited number of words related to immediate needs and can respond with simple learned phrases to some common questions related to routine survival situations. Speaks slowly and with difficulty. Demonstrates little or no control over grammar.</p> | <p>Individual can read numbers and letters and some common sight words. May be able to sound out simple words. Can read and write some familiar words and phrases, but has a limited understanding of connected prose in English. Can write basic personal information (e.g., name, address, telephone number) and can complete simple forms that elicit this information.</p> | <p>Individual functions with difficulty in social situations and in situations related to immediate needs. Can provide limited personal information on simple forms, and can read very simple common forms of print found in the home and environment, such as product names. Can handle routine entry-level jobs that require very simple written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited knowledge and experience with computers.</p> |

Table 1. National Reporting System Functioning Level Table (Continued)

Outcome Measures Definitions
Effective July 1, 2006

| Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Literacy Level | Listening and Speaking | Basic Reading and Writing | Functional and Workplace Skills |
| <p>High Beginning ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 191–200 Listening: 191–200 Writing: 146–200</p> <p>Oral BEST: 29–41 (SPL 3) BEST Plus: 418–438 (SPL 3) BEST Literacy: 36–46 (SPL 3)</p> | <p>Individual can understand common words, simple phrases, and sentences containing familiar vocabulary, spoken slowly with some repetition. Individual can respond to simple questions about personal everyday activities and can express immediate needs, using simple learned phrases or short sentences. Shows limited control of grammar.</p> | <p>Individual can read most sight words and many other common words. Can read familiar phrases and simple sentences, but has a limited understanding of connected prose and may need frequent rereading.</p> <p>Individual can write some simple sentences with limited vocabulary. Meaning may be unclear. Writing shows very little control of basic grammar, capitalization, and punctuation and has many spelling errors.</p> | <p>Individual can function in some situations related to immediate needs and in familiar social situations. Can provide basic personal information on simple forms and recognizes simple common forms of print found in the home, workplace, and community. Can handle routine entry-level jobs requiring basic written or oral English communication and in which job tasks can be demonstrated. May have limited knowledge or experience using computers.</p> |
| <p>Low Intermediate ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 201–210 Listening: 201–210 Writing: 201–225</p> <p>Oral BEST: 42–50 (SPL 4) BEST Plus: 439–472 (SPL 4) BEST Literacy: 47–53 (SPL 5)</p> | <p>Individual can understand simple learned phrases and limited new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly with frequent repetition; can ask and respond to questions using such phrases; can express basic survival needs and participate in some routine social conversations, although with some difficulty, and has some control of basic grammar.</p> | <p>Individual can read simple material on familiar subjects and comprehend simple and compound sentences in single or linked paragraphs containing a familiar vocabulary; can write simple notes and messages on familiar situations, but lacks clarity and focus. Sentence structure lacks variety but shows some control of basic grammar (e.g., present and past tense) and consistent use of punctuation (e.g., periods, capitalization).</p> | <p>Individual can interpret simple directions and schedules, signs, and maps; can fill out simple forms but needs support on some documents that are not simplified; and can handle routine entry-level jobs that involve some written or oral English communication but in which job tasks can be demonstrated. Individual can use simple computer programs and can perform a sequence of routine tasks given directions using technology (e.g., fax machine, computer).</p> |

Table 1. National Reporting System Functioning Level Table (Continued)

Outcome Measures Definitions
Effective July 1, 2006

| Educational Functioning Level Descriptors—English as a Second Language Levels | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Literacy Level | Listening and Speaking | Basic Reading and Writing | Functional and Workplace Skills |
| <p>High Intermediate ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 211–220 Listening: 211–220 Writing: 226–242</p> <p>Oral BEST: 51–57 (SPL 5) BEST Plus: 473–506 (SPL 5) BEST Literacy: 54–65 (SPL 6)</p> | <p>Individual can understand learned phrases and short new phrases containing familiar vocabulary spoken slowly and with some repetition; can communicate basic survival needs with some help; can participate in conversation in limited social situations and use new phrases with hesitation; and relies on description and concrete terms. There is inconsistent control of more complex grammar.</p> | <p>Individual can read text on familiar subjects that have a simple and clear underlying structure (e.g., clear main idea, chronological order); can use context to determine meaning; can interpret actions required in specific written directions; can write simple paragraphs with main idea and supporting details on familiar topics (e.g., daily activities, personal issues) by recombining learned vocabulary and structures; and can self- and peer edit for spelling and punctuation errors.</p> | <p>Individual can meet basic survival and social needs, can follow some simple oral and written instruction, and has some ability to communicate on the telephone on familiar subjects; can write messages and notes related to basic needs; can complete basic medical forms and job applications; and can handle jobs that involve basic oral instructions and written communication in tasks that can be clarified orally. Individual can work with or learn basic computer software, such as word processing, and can follow simple instructions for using technology.</p> |
| <p>Advanced ESL</p> <p><i>Test Benchmark:</i></p> <p>CASAS scale scores: Reading: 221–235 Listening: 221–235 Writing: 243–260</p> <p>Oral BEST: 58–64 (SPL 6) BEST Plus: 507–540 (SPL 6) BEST Literacy: 66 and above (SPL 7)</p> <p><i>Exit Criteria:</i></p> <p>CASAS Reading and Listening: 236 and above CASAS Writing: 261 and above Oral BEST: 65 and above (SPL 7) BEST Plus: 541 and above (SPL 7)</p> | <p>Individual can understand and communicate in a variety of contexts related to daily life and work. Can understand and participate in conversation on a variety of everyday subjects, including some unfamiliar vocabulary, but may need repetition or rewording. Can clarify own or others' meaning by rewording. Can understand the main points of simple discussions and informational communication in familiar contexts. Shows some ability to go beyond learned patterns and construct new sentences. Shows control of basic grammar, but has difficulty using more complex structures. Has some basic fluency of speech.</p> | <p>Individual can read moderately complex text related to life roles and descriptions and narratives from authentic materials on familiar subjects. Uses context and word analysis skills to understand vocabulary, and uses multiple strategies to understand unfamiliar texts. Can make inferences, predictions, and compare and contrast information in familiar texts. Individual can write multiparagraph text (e.g., organizes and develops ideas with clear introduction, body, and conclusion), using some complex grammar and a variety of sentence structures. Makes some grammar and spelling errors. Uses a range of vocabulary.</p> | <p>Individual can function independently to meet most survival needs and to use English in routine social and work situations. Can communicate on the telephone on familiar subjects. Understands radio and television on familiar topics. Can interpret routine charts, tables, and graphs, and can complete forms and handle work demands that require nontechnical oral and written instructions and routine interaction with the public. Individual can use common software, learn new basic applications, and select the correct basic technology in familiar situations.</p> |

CASAS: Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems; BEST: Basic English Skills Test; SPL: Student Performance Level.
Note: From National Reporting System for Adult Education: www.nrsweb.org/

Performance Objective

Telephone the school office to report a child's absence. Give the name of the child, the child's teacher or class, and the reason for the absence.

Notes:

Note: From National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics. (2004). *Practitioner toolkit: Working with adult English language learners*. Louisville, KY & Washington, DC: Author. Available from www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/prac_toolkit.html

Planning an Assessment Task

The goal of performance tasks is to acquire evidence that students have achieved the knowledge and skills to complete the learning objective.

When designing a performance task, ask yourself—

- ▶ Does the task measure what has been taught?
- ▶ Does the task mirror a real-world application of the knowledge and skills?
- ▶ Does the task allow students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills?

Directions

Read the learning objectives and the assessment tasks below. Decide whether or not they are well designed based on the criteria above. Discuss your answers with a partner.

Learning Objective: Telephone the school office to report a child's absence. Give the name of the child, the child's teacher or class, and the reason for the absence.

Performance task: *Give students a contact assignment to call the teacher's voice mail and leave a message; or students can record a message, without a script, using a tape recorder.*

| | Yes | No | Because |
|--|-----|----|---------|
| Does it measure what has been taught? | | | |
| Does it mirror real-world problems? | | | |
| Can students demonstrate their knowledge and skills? | | | |

Learning Objective: Given visuals of housing problems, students will call and report a problem, request repairs, and make an appointment for repairs.

Performance task: *Students will write a letter to the landlord making a complaint about the housing problems.*

| | Yes | No | Because |
|--|-----|----|---------|
| Does it measure what has been taught? | | X | |
| Does it mirror real-world problems? | X | | |
| Can students demonstrate their knowledge and skills? | | X | |

Directions

Describe another task for this learning objective. Share it with a partner. Your partner will check that it meets the above criteria. Check your partners work.

| | Yes | No | Because |
|--|-----|----|---------|
| Does it measure what has been taught? | | | |
| Does it mirror real-world problems? | | | |
| Can students demonstrate their knowledge and skills? | | | |

Sample Assessment Activities: Line Dialogue

Highlights: This activity is good for a change of pace and gets learners out of their chairs and interacting with everyone in the class. A great deal of peer teaching and friendly conversation can happen throughout this activity.

Objectives: Learners get intensive (repeated many times) practice using the targeted language in short dialogues. Learners may get to know one another in an atmosphere where peer teaching is naturally supported.

Context: This activity can be used in all levels or multilevel classes. It is suitable for general ESL classes as well as specific classes such as those designed for the workplace or family literacy. This activity works best for classes with at least 10–12 learners.

Estimated time: The first time this activity is used, the explanation may require several repetitions and demonstrations. Afterward, line dialogues should take no more than 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, the activity may become a little tedious.

Materials: Learners in one line have cue cards that are used to elicit responses from learners in the other line. Cue cards can contain word or picture clues for responses to questions. Realia (authentic items) are also effective for beginning-level classes. If learners are using familiar questions such as “What is your name?” or “How are you?” no cue card prompts may be necessary. For higher-level students, cue cards will probably not be needed. Questions for higher-level students come from the targeted language. “What would you do if you won one million dollars?” or “What would you like to be doing 10 years from now?” might be questions asked and answered in a line dialogue with intermediate or advanced learners.

Procedure:

1. Preteach the dialogue.
2. Learners form two lines face each other. Hand out cue cards to learners in Line A. These cue cards are used to elicit responses from learners in Line B.
3. Line A remains stationary, repeating the same questions to every learner in Line B. Learners in Line B listen to the question, look at the cue cards, respond to the question, and then move to the right and face another learner in Line A. All pairs talk at once. The last person in Line B moves to the beginning of the line. The activity continues until everyone in Line A has asked a question to everyone in Line B. **Example:** Task: Learners will identify body parts from visuals. Dialogue: A (showing cue card to person in Line B): What’s wrong? B: My back hurts.

Note: There are a variety of ways to set up a line dialogue. Only one line can ask questions, or both lines can ask questions. As discussed above, cue cards may or may not be used. In classes where learners have some comfort and familiarity with everyday language, learners decide on their own what questions to ask. In all cases, one line remains stationary and the other moves.

Evaluation: This activity provides the teacher with an excellent opportunity to unobtrusively evaluate learners; once learners understand how to conduct a line dialogue, they usually have so much fun that they don't pay attention to the teacher at all. During this activity, the teacher can observe learners' speaking and listening skills, vocabulary knowledge, question formation, clarification skills, and even comfort level using English.

Extension activities: To give learners an opportunity to speak English with others, two small classes could participate in the line dialogue. These classes could be at approximately the same level, or the less advanced class could be in the stationary line and practice the questions in advance.

Note: From *ESL Curriculum for Adults*. (n.d.). Arlington, VA: Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP). Adapted with permission. Available from www.arlington.k12.va.us/instruct/ctae/adult_ed/REEP/reepcurriculum

Sample Assessment Activities: Information Gap

Highlights: In this activity two learners share information to complete a task. In one-way gap activities, one learner has all the information (e.g., one learner describes a picture and the other learner draws it). In two-way gap activities, both learners have some information and must share it with the other to complete the task. Because this activity usually combines speaking and listening with reading and writing, all the skills are practiced.

Objective: Learners find and share information by asking and answering questions to complete a task.

Context: This activity can be used in all levels or with multilevel groups. It is suitable for general ESL classes as well as specific classes such as those designed for family literacy or the workplace.

Estimated time: The time varies but usually ranges between 20 and 35 minutes.

Materials: The teacher prepares a master handout based on information, language structures, and vocabulary the students have been working on. Then, the teacher deletes pieces of information on two sets of handouts. For example, Handout A will have some information deleted that Handout B will provide. Handout B will have other pieces of information deleted that Handout A will provide. In a workplace context, the master could be a weekly schedule or list of work tasks with different items or tasks missing from Handout A and Handout B. Types and amounts of missing information can be varied to meet the needs of learners at different levels.

Procedure:

1. Preteach and practice vocabulary and structures for the particular task. Learners should also be familiar with question-and-answer formulas (e.g., “What time is ___” and “It’s at ___”) and ways to ask for clarification (e.g., “Excuse me, can you repeat,” or “I’m sorry, I don’t understand”). These can be introduced in the beginning days of a class and recycled, adapted, and extended over time.
2. Explain the information-gap procedures by modeling a sample gap activity with an able volunteer from the class.
3. Have learners work with a partner. One learner in each pair gets Handout A and the other gets Handout B. Ask two learners to model asking and answering questions in the gap activity before the whole class begins the activity.

Note: For a multilevel class, you can make the A form more difficult than the B form. Be sure to pass out the papers to the appropriate person. The first time you do this activity, some learners may be somewhat confused, but as you repeat this activity in other contexts, learners will feel comfortable. Ask learners not to show each other their forms, but don’t worry when that occurs.

4. Learners ask and answer questions and record answers until both handouts A and B have been completed.

5. When they are finished, learners compare their papers with each other.
6. To complete the activity as a whole group, you can ask volunteers to come up to the board or overhead projector to fill in information they've gathered from their partner. This helps solidify the knowledge and gives some slower learners or pairs a chance to catch up and check their work without stress.

Evaluation: Walking around the room observing learners during the activity will let you know how well individual learners use and understand English in the activity.

Variations: The handouts may be menus, store ads, maps, pictures, or charts, as well as readings.

Extension activities: Let learners create their own information-gap activities.

Sample Assessment Activities: Conversation Grid

Highlights: The power of using conversation grid activities is that learners are involved in authentic, independent, and cooperative conversation without direct teacher involvement. These grids can be used with any topic as teaching or assessment activities. Learners usually enjoy them greatly.

Objective: Learners practice and increase knowledge of language structures (such as what, when, where, and why questions and their typical answers), vocabulary (as related to a particular topic such as “on the job”), and cultural aspects related to a topic. They ask questions, listen to answers, and record information on the grid.

Context: This activity is suitable for general ESL classes as well as specific classes such as those designed for family literacy or the workplace.

Estimated time: The time varies but usually ranges between 20 and 30 minutes.

Draw a large grid on the board or have an overhead transparency or PowerPoint slide with a sample of the grid to explain the activity. Learners need conversation grids to record answers. (See examples that follow.) Grids can have complete questions (e.g., What is your job now? What do you like to do in your free time?) or cue phrases (e.g., job in United States; hobbies).

Procedure:

1. Review language structures and key vocabulary that have been taught previously and are needed to successfully complete this activity. The review should be oral and written with plenty of input from the learners. For example, if one of the questions is going to be about their native country, with learner input put the names of all the countries that learners are from up on the board or on flipchart paper so this information will be easily accessible when learners begin to work on their own grids.
2. Hand out the grids and explain the task: “Today you’re going to interview five classmates. You will write their answers to your questions on this form.”
3. Discuss conversation questions, e.g., “What is your job now?” “What do you like to do in your free time?” “What else do you like to do?”
4. Talk about possible answers such as *construction worker*, *play soccer*, *watch soccer on TV*.
5. Model the task with one or two learner volunteers. It’s important to model several questions and answers so that learners know that full-sentence answers such as “I am a construction worker” or short answers such as “construction worker” are both acceptable.

Note: As in all activities, modeling correct responses to structures, such as “her name” vs. “she name,” is more effective than giving a big explanation about the correct grammar. This is especially true with formulaic phrases that use structures not yet discussed in class.

6. Check comprehension of instructions. For example, ask, “How many questions are you asking each classmate?” “How many people will you speak with today?”
7. Once learners begin the activity, monitor the process and be ready to assist learners if they ask for help.
Note: Some will finish only one conversation, while others may do several. That’s okay; people process, learn, and interact at different rates.
8. When the general buzz quiets down, it is time to stop the activity. Discuss the information with the class, for example, “Tell the class something you learned about one of your classmates.” You can tabulate information on a master grid or have learners work in small groups to do a tabulation of their grid information.

Evaluation: Evaluation is ongoing and informal. The teacher can participate in or just observe the conversations to note communicative abilities (as well as observe writing abilities from the grid). It is particularly useful to watch individual learners progress from week to week.

Conversation Grid: Personal Identification (All Levels)

| What is your first name? (spell it please) | Where are you from? | What is your address? |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Rosario | Mexico | 701 N. Oak St. |
| | | |
| | | |

Conversation Grid: Work (Intermediate and Advanced Levels)

| What's your name? | What's your job now? | How long have you had this job? | What was your job in your home country? |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Jose Gomez | construction worker | 5 months | engineer |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Conversation Grid: Free Time (Intermediate and Advanced Levels)

| What's your name? | What do you like to do in your free time? | When do you have free time? | What did you do in your free time in your country? |
|-------------------|---|-----------------------------|--|
| Hajib Mansoor | play soccer | on Sunday afternoon | play soccer and go fishing |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Note: From National Center for Family Literacy & Center for Applied Linguistics. (2004). *Practitioner toolkit: Working with adult English language learners*. Louisville, KY & Washington, DC: Author. Available from www.cal.org/caela/tools/program_development/elltoolkit/CombinedFilesI.pdf

Sample Assessment Activities: Guiding Questions

Line Dialogue

1. What is the purpose of this activity?
2. How does a line dialogue work?
3. How can it be used as an assessment activity?

Information Gap

1. What is the purpose of this activity?
2. How do information-gap activities work?
3. How can it be used as an assessment activity?

Conversation Grid

1. What is the purpose of this activity?
2. How does a conversation-grid activity work?
3. How can it be used as an assessment activity?

Figure 1. Observation Measure for Listening and Reading

Type of assessment: Observation measure.

Purpose: To assess listening and reading skills.

Method: After learners listen to or read instructions, staff members assess their performance and check the appropriate box in the chart.

For example: After learning how to make instant chocolate pudding for a class party, learners are asked to follow oral or written instructions for making vanilla pudding (familiar instructions) and gelatin dessert (new instructions).

Learners who can comprehend and read instructions without asking questions or looking terribly puzzled are rated “With ease.” Those who occasionally ask to have a word provided, a sentence modeled, or seek help from peers are rated “With some support.” Learners who need to consult a dictionary, ask peers for translation, or constantly observe others are checked “With great difficulty.”

| Receptive skills | | With ease | With some support | With great difficulty | Not at all |
|------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Listening | Follows familiar instructions | | | | |
| | Follows new instructions | | | | |
| Reading | Reads familiar instructions | | | | |
| | Reads new instructions | | | | |

Note: From Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.) (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL*. McHenry, IL & Washington, DC: Delta Systems & Center for Applied Linguistics.

Figure 2. Can-Do List for Self-Assessment

Put a checkmark (✓) in the box that best describes you (one ✓ for each row).

| Here's what I can do. | I can do this. No problem. | I do OK most of the time, except when things are complicated. | This is a little difficult for me, but I can do it with some help from others. | This is very difficult for me. I can only do it with a lot of help from others. | I can't do this. No way. It's much too difficult. |
|---|----------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| Talk about my country and my city with a friend or neighbor | | | | | |
| Ask for directions on the street or ask where something is in a store | | | | | |
| Ask someone to speak more slowly or to say things in a different way | | | | | |
| Fill out a form (name, birth-date, address, phone) | | | | | |
| Explain about myself and my work in a job interview | | | | | |
| Understand the notes that my child's teacher sends home from school | | | | | |
| Figure out my phone bill or electricity bill | | | | | |
| Shop for food and clothes. | | | | | |
| Explain to the doctor in detail what's wrong with me | | | | | |
| Pick a story in the newspaper and read it | | | | | |
| Understand the news on TV | | | | | |

Note: From Holt, D. D., & Van Duzer, C. H. (Eds.) (2000). *Assessing success in family literacy and adult ESL*. McHenry, IL & Washington, DC: Delta Systems & Center for Applied Linguistics.

Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 1

Directions

1. Think about the students whose levels you identified using the NRS level descriptions.
2. Use the following learning objective to complete the task:

Telephone the school office to report a child's absence. Give the name of the child, the child's teacher or class, and the reason for the absence.

3. Review the Planning an Assessment Task worksheet you completed earlier.
4. Complete the planning sheet below.

Performance Task

Describe the assessment task you will use. *Performance tasks should simulate real-world tasks, be level appropriate, and provide students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills.*

Observation Measure

What criteria will you use to evaluate performances?

What rating scale will you use to measure performances?

Presentation Assessment Checklist

| Group 1 | Group 2 |
|--|--|
| <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear | <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear |
| Group 3 | Group 4 |
| <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear | <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear |
| Group 5 | Group 6 |
| <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear | <p>The performance task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> simulates real-world tasks <input type="checkbox"/> is level appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> provides students with opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills <p>The criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> are measurable <input type="checkbox"/> are appropriate for the task <p>The rating scale</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> is clear |

Planning a Performance Assessment Task: Practice Activity 2

Directions

1. Think about the students whose levels you identified using the NRS level descriptions.
2. Use one of the learning objectives on the next page to complete the task.
3. Review the Planning an Assessment Task worksheet you completed earlier and the ESL activity descriptions.
4. Complete the planning sheet below.

Topic: _____

Proficiency level: _____

Learning objective: _____

The desired result of this objective is that

Therefore, I need evidence that students can

So, my assessment task needs to include some things like

Performance Task

Describe the assessment task you will use.

Observation Measure

What criteria will you use to evaluate performances?

What rating scale will you use to measure performances?

Learning Objectives: Practice Activity 2

1. NRS Level: Beginning ESL Literacy

Identify key dates on a child's school calendar, including holidays, parent/teacher conferences, and report card dates.

2. NRS Level: High Beginning ESL

Schedule a doctor's appointment over the telephone. State the reason for the visit, provide personal information, and set the date and time for the appointment.

3. NRS Level: Low Intermediate ESL

Complete a job application, including personal identification, education, and work history.

My Action Plan

Because of today's workshop I understand

When I plan classroom assessments I will start doing

I have more questions about

I will continue my learning by

Assessment in the Adult ESL Classroom

Workshop Evaluation

Expectations About Contents of the Workshop

What did you hope to gain from this course or workshop? (please ✓ all that apply)

- Basic introduction or exposure to subject
- In-depth theory or study of subject
- Strategies and ideas about how to implement subject
- Information to take back and share at program
- More general information about subject
- Other _____

Did the workshop fulfill your expectations and needs? (please circle one)

Not at all Barely Sufficiently A great deal Completely

Please explain why you circled the above.

Quality of the Workshop

| Area | Quality (please ✓ one) | | | | Comments/Suggestions for Improvement |
|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Trainer style | Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> | Good <input type="checkbox"/> | Fair <input type="checkbox"/> | Poor <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Presentation and progress (balance between trainer and participant involvement, kinds of activities, etc.) | Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> | Good <input type="checkbox"/> | Fair <input type="checkbox"/> | Poor <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Materials (handouts, etc.) | Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> | Good <input type="checkbox"/> | Fair <input type="checkbox"/> | Poor <input type="checkbox"/> | |
| Organization of workshops (arrangement of content, flow of activities, etc.) | Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> | Good <input type="checkbox"/> | Fair <input type="checkbox"/> | Poor <input type="checkbox"/> | |

Follow-Up Activity

As a result of these workshops, what do you hope to try in your classroom or program?

Other Comments

Notes