



# ACUE

Student Success  
Through Exceptional  
Teaching

## Expert Insights

**Ken O'Connor, MEd; Author and Consultant; Assess for Success Consulting, Inc** [00:00:00] Quality assessment, I believe, has three basic components. That we have clear learning goals, clear targets, both the what and the how well. That we're clear about the purpose of each assessment: Is it occurring before instruction, as a preassessment, as a diagnostic assessment, just information for the teacher to decide how they're going to plan their instruction? Is it formative assessment, assessment that's while the learning is going on? So its purpose is to provide information for the teacher to adjust their teaching and their students to adjust their learning. Or is it a summative assessment, where we're gonna use the results to make judgments about student achievement? And the third condition of accurate assessment is that we have sound design.

**Narrator** [00:00:48] Just like collecting pictures, souvenirs, and passport stamps as reminders of your travels, course assignments and assessments can help both you and your students gather evidence of the knowledge gained and skills mastered as they travel through your course. You may start with preassessments to help uncover students' prior knowledge. The information you gain can inform adjustments to your teaching and the development of additional resources students might need to address learning gaps. Think of this as checking the air in the tires and gas in the tank before starting a long journey.

**Tracie Addy, PhD; Associate Dean of Teaching and Learning; Director, Center for the Integration of Teaching, Learning, & Scholarship; Lafayette College** [00:01:24] Yeah, we know from learning science that prior knowledge and building upon it is actually going to promote learning. So when we start in places later than where students really are outside of where they're starting and their learning, they're gonna have a harder time picking up those concepts. So it's really important to start where students are, at and assessing where they are, and then having that be a starting point for any type of learning. So whether that's, you know, giving students kind of some of these low-stakes opportunities to share what they already know about a subject. We think of also these diagnostic, kind of little quizzes and things like that, that are very low-stakes, you know, not to produce anxiety or anything for students, but really to just find out where we need to start for the class that's gonna, in the long run, be beneficial for the students with regards to actually building that foundation up for their conceptual framework.

**Narrator** [00:02:21] Next, take steps to ensure that the course assessment and assignments measure the type of thinking identified by the action verbs in your course outcomes and learning objectives.

**Thomas A. Angelo, EdD; Clinical Professor; Educational Innovation and Research; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill** [00:02:31] I have to really set assessments, create kinds of tasks that allow students to demonstrate whether they've understood and mastered to the appropriate level the kind of outcomes that we've set. So I think we need a range of assessments, and different kinds of assessments are more most efficient and effective for different levels of Bloom's taxonomy outcomes.

**Narrator** [00:02:58] Start by using the chart titled "Action Verbs by Cognitive Level," which organizes action verbs into the six cognitive levels outlined in Anderson and Krathwohl's revision of Bloom's taxonomy. The six cognitive levels include remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating. You can then use the identified cognitive level of your outcomes and learning objectives to review the varied assignment and assessment types found in the chart titled "Types of Assessments by Cognitive Level." For example, tests with multiple-choice questions or items that have single correct answers are useful in assessing students' ability to remember facts and figures. Short answer prompts in an exam or in a discussion that ask students to summarize or paraphrase material can determine a student's understanding beyond basic recall of information. Next, problem sets, performances, lab experiments, and simulations are good ways to assess a student's ability to select and apply the right information or procedure in a given situation. While case studies, project and papers, debates, and larger experiments can determine a student's ability to analyze facts, data, concepts, and situations. Assignments that ask students to judge or critique readings, works of art, products, or processes against established criteria or



standards are a good way to assess their ability to evaluate. Portfolios can provide both opportunities for students to provide evidence of their learning in relation to set standards, as well as reflection on their growth.

**Ken O'Connor, MEd** [00:04:45] Portfolios are a wonderful way to show mastery and development of learning over time. A lot of psychological research that now says that one of the key aspects of motivation is seeing yourself getting better, and portfolios provide that so that we have as actual physical—although it may be in the digital portfolio—where we can see that and the professor, the teacher can see it as well.

**Narrator** [00:05:13] When we ask students to conduct original research, compose an essay or a piece of music, give a performance, design a website or a new invention, or prepare a business plan, we're assessing their ability to create. Additionally, you may consider formatting test questions in alignment with the type of thinking required in accreditation and licensure exams to offer students practice opportunities that build their confidence and prepare them for success.

**Tracie Addy, PhD** [00:05:40] Some students, especially those preparing for professional schools or, you know, certain types of future careers where they will have to take a number of high-stakes assessments to demonstrate their competency, they're gonna also need to practice that as well in a course. So having them also have some opportunities to practice those types of questions that will be actually on those exams is going to be very useful. We know that, that is also a very effective way to actually learn and do well on tests is to actually practice kind of retrieval, actually undergoing the same types of things that you would actually do on the test. So go through those same steps. And those students will actually be successful, right, when they, when they take those high-stakes tests.

**Narrator** [00:06:30] Next, just like planning fueling stops before the tank is near empty, strategically sequence assessments and assignments so that your students demonstrate mastery of foundational concepts early on, ensuring they have the skills necessary to successfully complete more complex tasks later in the journey. Then, as they continue the journey, you may have them use assessment and assignment data to track their progress toward course outcomes.

**Aaron M. Pallas, PhD; Professor of Sociology and Education; Education Policy and Social Analysis; Teachers College, Columbia University** [00:06:56] The sequencing and pacing of core concepts, I think, does involve an ongoing process of examination and correction, so assessments are very important. We want to figure out whether your students are in fact learning what you want them to learn before you get too far along. And that's especially true if there is a sense of sequencing and a trajectory of learning that implies that you have to learn one thing before you learn another. If a student or a group of students hasn't mastered a foundational idea on which other ideas will build, it can be important to circle back and revisit how students are engaging with those concepts. So it's important, I think, to have ongoing informal assessments along with the formal assessments that may be built into a course's design to help an instructor gauge whether in fact the sequencing and pacing is working the way it's intended.

**Narrator** [00:07:55] And remember, not all assignments and assessments need to be high stakes. Offering students formative assessments and assignments as opportunities to demonstrate their understanding and receive feedback allows students and you the opportunity to identify strengths and receive feedback on areas for improvement.

**Thomas A. Angelo, EdD** [00:08:14] Formative assessment is, in essence, coaching. A formative assessment is meant to help students improve their performance before the summative assessment. So just like we rehearse as musicians before we have concerts, just like we practice as athletes before we have a game, just like dancers rehearse before their recitals, students need to rehearse and get feedback before the moment in which their



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grades are going to be determined. And formative assessment is exactly that. It's a chance for them to get feedback in time to improve their performance and to give them direction on how to improve that performance.

**Narrator** [00:08:55] Just as a tour guide provides an itinerary with scheduled stops, be sure to give students written guidelines or a video that clearly articulates your expectations for each assignment or assessment. You may use the Transparent Assignment Template developed by Mary-Ann Winkelmes, to ensure clarity of learning and expectations. This format has also been shown to increase a student's sense of belonging, academic confidence, and awareness of their mastery of the skills employers value most when hiring—all important predictors of student success.

**Mary-Ann Winkelmes, PhD; Executive Director, Center for Teaching and Learning; Principal Investigator and Founder, TILT Higher Ed; Brandeis University** [00:09:30] Where we've tested transparency most of all, recently, is in entry-level courses for first-year students. That was because we thought we could have a great impact on overall retention and graduation rates if we could eliminate that cohort of students who drop out in the first year of college because they lack confidence or a sense of belonging or an understanding of what their purpose is, what are they learning and how is it helpful to them? We noticed in our own study that for all students who received greater transparency about their academic work, they experienced a boost in their academic confidence and their sense of belonging, as well as their awareness that they were building skills that employers care about, according to national surveys of employers. For all students, transparency was beneficial. But for the underserved students, it was even more so. When we asked teachers to try this twice in a semester, we helped the well-prepared students a statistically significant amount, and the underprepared students or the underserved students coming in, we helped them a whole lot more. This almost has become a kind of social justice way of teaching that levels the playing field of opportunity for all students.

**Narrator** [00:10:42] Assessments and assignments aligned to the cognitive level of your outcomes and learning objectives with well-defined expectations ensure both more accurate grades using these measures and more equitable opportunities for all students to meet with success, now and in their future courses, programs, and careers.