*Please share with your faculty:*

**Defining success on assessments**

The purpose of educational assessments is to determine whether students are achieving student learning objectives. Assessments can provide valuable feedback to both instructors and students about the extent of student learning, including areas of strength, and areas in need of improvement. This feedback can allow instructors to adjust, revise, or enhance their instruction and curricula to bolster students’ attainment of learning objectives. It also can allow students to identify areas in need of improvement so that they can seek the clarity and support that they need to succeed.

Clearly defining what constitutes success on an assessment is important for accurate evaluation of learning, and to ensure that the assessment clearly aligns with learning objectives. Defining success on an assessment entails identifying the criteria and performance level that indicates whether a learning objective has been achieved. This process is called ***benchmarking*** and allows for quantifying success through measurable standards. Having measurable and objective standards takes the subjectivity out of grading and allows for objective decisions about whether success has been achieved.

The most effective way for identifying benchmarks and setting performance targets is to use analytic scoring rubrics to evaluate students’ success in attaining an objective. Rubrics outline the criteria that must be achieved for an objective and different levels of performance for each criterion. Setting a benchmark with a rubric involves identifying what performance level is considered successful mastery of an objective.

Setting a ***performance target*** also is important. A performance target indicates the desired percentage of students that should achieve a benchmark in order to determine whether the course or program was successful as a whole in meeting its objectives for students.

By way of an example, if a program wishes to determine whether students are demonstrating critical thinking skills, the first step is to identify objective and measurable criteria that indicate criterial thinking. Next, the program should create or identify an established critical thinking rubric, such as the [Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric](https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics/value-rubrics-critical-thinking). Such a rubric outlines the predetermined criteria that define critical thinking. It also identifies different performance levels for each criterion. Each performance level should be accompanied by examples of what constitutes that level of performance.

Once the rubric has been established, the program should identify which performance level is considered mastery of critical thinking skills and set a performance target. It is also important to keep in mind that rubrics are not set in stone. The criteria and performance levels may need to be modified or revised to best reflect the desired objective. Also, the benchmark and performance target also may need to be adjusted if evidence suggests that performance expectations are not reasonable (i.e., expectations are either too easy or too hard).

By defining success on assessments, programs can objectively track over time whether students are achieving desired objectives and can use this feedback to make valuable improvements for student learning and instruction.

If you need any help with this process, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

**Check out!** Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (2017). Using rubrics to assess student learning outcomes at the program level. *The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*. <https://assessment.unc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1284/2022/07/Developing-and-Using-Rubrics.pdf>

**Please share examples** of how your program defines success on assessments using rubrics so that I will feature those examples on [YU’s Learning Assessment Website](http://yu.edu/provost/assessment/).

**Important reminders:**

Fall 2024 assessment reports are now due by **January 31**. ***Please note* the report form has been updated this semester. Please be sure you are using the form that says Fall 2024.**

I have also developed a supplemental ***Excel curriculum map matrix (sheet 1), and a program assessment planning matrix (sheet 2***). Although not required for the Fall 2024 semester, please feel free to use the Excel matrix forms if you would find them helpful for developing your curriculum maps and program assessment plans.

Please contact me with any questions.

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