

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS AND ALIGNING ACTIVITIES

Last week in the Teacher’s Corner, we explored the idea of choosing a final, summative assessment task as the first step in lesson planning. This week, we will discuss some options for summative assessment activities, ideas for using rubrics, and how to be sure that the rest of your lesson prepares students for your summative task.

ESSAYS OR PROJECTS

Asking students to write essays or create projects is a great way to provide an opportunity for them to summarize or apply what they have learned during a unit of study. In language classrooms, these two types of assignments require students to demonstrate their ability to use language structures or specific vocabulary in an authentic task.

Here is an example that incorporates arguments and the future tense. Students read articles that argue a position or state opinions and have mock debates as part of the unit. As a final assessment, they write an argumentative essay where they take a position on the use of mobile phones in the classroom. They choose a stance, *for* or *against*, and discuss three potential benefits or consequences using the future tense and the *If, then* sentence structure. In their essays, they also incorporate related vocabulary such as *pro, con, advantage, disadvantage, benefit, and drawback*. To assign this as a project with the same language requirements, ask students to make a poster or brochure supporting their stance.

PRESENTATIONS, SPEECHES, SKITS, OR COMMERCIALS

Assignments like presentations, speeches, skits, or commercials are creative tasks that ask students to incorporate what they have learned into some type of performance. They are a great way to offer students who are stronger at speaking or performing a chance to excel. These tasks can be less structured than an essay or project and allow students more creative freedom to demonstrate what they have learned. Additionally, students enjoy seeing their peers perform. Therefore, the audience can often be just as engaged in watching the performance as the presenters are in performing it! This type of assignment provides students with a chance to review information both as performers and audience members, something they would not experience by handing in an essay or taking a test.

For example, as a summative assessment for the topic of mobile phone use in the classroom, students can make a presentation or give a speech arguing for or against the use of mobile phones in the classroom.

The same requirements can still apply: students use the future tense, argue a position with three potential outcomes, use *If, then* structures, and incorporate some key vocabulary. Students can also create a commercial or skit with the same requirements.

PORTFOLIOS

Portfolios are collections of student work used to demonstrate the student's mastery of specific content. Portfolios can include classwork, homework, assessment tasks given by the teacher, peer assessments, or self-assessments conducted by the student. Pre- and post-tests, item descriptions, or student reflections may also be included.

Some portfolios aim to show student growth. These may include early assignments where it is evident that the student did not grasp the concepts being taught, and then later assignments where the student was able to perform successfully. The purpose of this type of portfolio is to show that the student's understanding of content has increased over time. Including a pre- and post-test in a portfolio of this type is a great way to show that the student has improved. An additional benefit of this type of portfolio is that it shows students their own progress over time.

Other portfolios aim to showcase a student's best work related to a certain skill or learning outcome. In creating this type of portfolio, one would likely give his/her students a choice about which items to include. For instance, if students have completed a total of fifteen assignments related to a specific learning outcome or skill, ask them to choose ten items to include in the portfolio. Depending on the age of your students, you can also assist them with making choices about what to include.

Sometimes teachers ask students to provide a description of each item in a portfolio or even a reflection about how the piece of work demonstrates their learning or growth. This can be done with any type of portfolio. Here are some sample questions for students to answer:

- How did this activity require you to show your understanding of the concept or topic?
- If you struggled with this assignment, how well do you think you would complete it now? What would you do differently?
- How does this collection of work show that you improved your understanding of the topic over time?
- Why did you choose to include these specific assignments to demonstrate your performance?

USING RUBRICS

Rubrics are an excellent tool to use with summative assessment tasks such as those described above. A rubric allows you as a teacher to clearly communicate what a highly successful performance on a task looks like, therefore giving your students specific criteria to guide their completion of an assignment. Let's revisit the example of writing an argumentative essay for or against the use of mobile phones in the classroom. Based on the requirements you have given your students, start creating a rubric by thinking about what the most successful essay would include. Then, define criteria for each subsequent level of performance on the task. Here is an example rubric.

| | Stance/Position | Supporting Reasons | Vocabulary Use | Future Tense | <i>If, then</i> Sentences |
|----------|---|---|--|---|--|
| 4 | Clearly stated in introduction, aligned with reasons, consistent throughout essay. | Three reasons are given and are well discussed and supported. | 9-10 of the key terms are used in the essay. | Tense is correctly used and consistent throughout the essay. | There is at least one "If, then" sentence in each paragraph. |
| 3 | Clear and consistent, but may not be stated in introduction. Well-aligned with reasons. | Three reasons are given but discussion or support needs more development. | 6-8 of the key terms are used in the essay. | There are fewer than five instances where the tense is not used or is used incorrectly. | One paragraph may not contain any sentences with "If, then" structure. |
| 2 | Position may not be clearly stated or not aligned | Only two reasons are given and/or there is not | 3-5 of the key terms are used in the essay. | There are fewer than ten instances where | Two paragraphs may not contain any sentences |

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| | with one reason. | enough discussion and support. | | the tense is not used or is used incorrectly. | with “If, then” structure. |
| 1 | Position not stated or inconsistent. Not aligned with two or more reasons. | Only one reason or no reasons are given and the support is not sufficient. | Fewer than 3 of the key terms are used in the essay. | There are ten or more instances where the tense is not used or is used incorrectly. | More than two paragraphs may not contain any sentences with “If, then” structure. |

Sharing the rubric with students before they begin their essays gives them exact criteria they must attend to in order to perform successfully on the assignment. Creating a rubric also helps you as a teacher to define exactly what student performance will look like at each level. This makes it easier to give students grades and enables you to be more consistent in evaluating their work.

ALIGNING LESSON ACTIVITIES WITH THE SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TASK

Returning to our water cycle example from last week, we know what our summative assessment task is. We want our students to be able to arrange illustrations of each step in the water cycle correctly on a poster, label them, and then write a paragraph explaining the cycle at each step. With this in mind, we can plan lessons and activities that stay focused and help our students achieve this particular goal. Take a look at the example activities below and decide which keep students on track to reach their final destination.

- Activity 1: Read aloud a book that explains how a raindrop travels through the steps in the water cycle and what happens to it along the way.
- Activity 2: Have the class brainstorm a list of different ways they use water.
- Activity 3: Have students work with a partner. Give each set of partners five pictures and five labels, one for each step in the water cycle. Have them match the labels to the pictures and arrange the cycle in order.
- Activity 4: Have students complete a word search to find vocabulary related to water and rainy weather. Have them check their word search with a partner to be sure they found all of the words.

- Activity 5: Watch a video about the steps in the water cycle. Watch it again, stopping after each step is presented. Each time you stop, have the class help you add information to an illustrated graphic organizer/chart, including descriptions of what happens at each step.

Remember, at the end of our unit, we expect that our students will be able to arrange illustrations of each step in the water cycle correctly on a poster, label them, and then, write a paragraph to explain the cycle, telling what happens in each step. If we keep this in mind, we can see that activities 2 and 4 do not align with the final goal because they do not teach students the necessary vocabulary or anything about what happens in the water cycle. While they may be related to the topic, they will not help increase students' knowledge of the steps and what happens during each one. Now, we can see the difference between activities that keep us on the route to our destination and those that could be considered wrong turns or unnecessary stops.

Moving on, we can plan our lesson or unit, possibly including example activities 1, 3, or 5 as formative assessments. **Formative assessments** are tasks or activities that provide information about what and how students are learning so that teachers can adjust instruction accordingly (Cabral et al. 2007, 202). If we see that our students perform poorly on a formative assessment task, we may need to reteach a concept or present content again in a different way.

Next week in Teacher's Corner, we will look at some easy ways to collect formative data in your classroom. This data will allow you to check your students' progress as you prepare them to succeed on your summative assessment task.

Reference

Cabral, Robin, Socorro G. Herrera, and Kevin G. Murry. *Assessment Accommodations for Classroom Teachers of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. First ed. Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2007.