

**The Insight**

We often attend to the importance of aligning learning outcomes with assessment strategies. But, it can also be helpful to think of the *who, what, when, where, why, and how* of assessment.

**Implications**

Breaking the assessment cycle into questions of *who, what, when, where, why* and *how* can facilitate deeper thinking about and analysis and use of assessment data.

*“Another way to conceive of this cycle is to think about the six “big questions” – who, what, when, where, why, and how – and how these questions can inform approaches to assessment.”*

**Assessment – Beyond the Cycle**

In their recent book, Elizabeth Barkley and Claire Howell Major describe the “Learning Assessment Technique Cycle” in familiar terms: clarify learning outcomes, determine purpose of assessment, select and implement assessment, analyze and share results, and use results to improve learning. Another way to conceive of this cycle is to think about the six “big questions” – who, what, when, where, why, and how – and how these questions can inform approaches to assessment. In this Learning Insight, I will provide prompts for each of these six questions. These prompts, which are by no means exhaustive in nature, may confirm some decisions you have already made and/or offer new ideas for future assessment efforts. See the table below for these prompts.

Question	Prompts
Who?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Who will take the assessment? Individual students? Pairs? Small groups?</li> <li>Who will grade the assessment, give students feedback, and/or analyze assessment data?</li> <li>Who is the intended audience for the assessment data? You, as the teacher? Your students, as a self-assessment? Other faculty in your department or in other departments? A relevant conference or journal? Prospective employers? Accrediting bodies?</li> </ul>
What?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What course learning outcomes are being assessed?</li> <li>What program learning outcomes, if any, are being assessed?</li> <li>Is non-content knowledge or skills required to succeed on the assessment – e.g., being able to give a PowerPoint presentation?</li> <li>What results will be communicated to different audiences?</li> <li>For what purposes will a given audience use the assessment data? To improve student learning? To assign a grade? To evaluate student eligibility for a job? To make credentialing or accreditation decisions?</li> <li>What do assessment data reveal about your students and the teaching and learning experience?</li> </ul>
When?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>At what point in the course will a given assessment be used? During a specific class – e.g., clicker questions or an ungraded writing assignment? For homework?</li> <li>By when will students need to receive feedback for it to be helpful or meaningful?</li> </ul>
Where?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Where will students complete the assessment? In class, face-to-face? Online? As a take-home exam?</li> <li>Where, in this course or other courses, might students need to apply the feedback from this assessment?</li> </ul>
Why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why is this assessment used – for formative or summative purposes, or both? Is it ungraded (given to offer feedback on learning) or graded?</li> <li>Is this a low-stakes or a high-stakes assessment?</li> <li>Why is this assessment relevant in your course? Do your students and other stakeholders understand its relevance?</li> </ul>
How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is learning being assessed? Are there alternative assessment strategies?</li> <li>How are assessment results communicated?</li> <li>How might assessment data be used to improve student learning?</li> </ul>

It is likely that you have already thought about some or all of these prompts. You may have additional prompts you would add to this table. Some prompts may seem new and helpful; perhaps others feel less relevant to your specific context. This table might foster interesting conversation with colleagues or be a useful self-reflection tool. If you have thoughts or questions about this Learning Insight, or other ideas for moving beyond the assessment cycle, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Reference:**

Barkley, E.F. & Major, C.H. (2016). *Learning assessment techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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