

## Summary of *Direct Assessment Techniques*

<b>DIRECT ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES</b> ( <i>Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education</i> by Allen 2004)		
<b>Technique</b>	<b>Potential Strength</b>	<b>Potential Limitations</b>
Published tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives</li> <li>• Generally, are carefully developed, highly reliable, professionally scored, and nationally normed</li> <li>• Frequently provide a number of norm groups, such as norms for community colleges, liberal arts colleges, and comprehensive universities</li> <li>• Online versions of tests are increasingly available, and some provide immediate scoring</li> <li>• Some publishers allow faculty to supplement tests with their own items, so tests can be adapted to better serve local needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the test does not reflect the learning objectives that faculty value and the curricula that students experience, results are likely to be discounted and inconsequential</li> <li>• Most published tests rely heavily on multiple-choice items that often focus on specific facts, but program learning objectives more often emphasize higher-level skills</li> <li>• Test scores may reflect criteria that are too broad for meaningful assessment</li> <li>• Students may not take the test seriously if test results have no impact on their lives</li> <li>• Tests can be expensive</li> <li>• The marginal gain from annual testing may be low</li> <li>• Faculty may object to standardized exam scores on general principles, leading them to ignore results</li> </ul>
Locally developed tests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives</li> <li>• Appropriate mixes of items allow faculty to address various types of learning objectives</li> <li>• Can provide for authentic assessment of higher-level learning</li> <li>• Students generally are motivated to display the extent of their learning</li> <li>• If well constructed, they are likely to have good validity</li> <li>• Because local faculty write the exam, they are likely to be interested in results and willing to use them</li> <li>• Can be integrated into routine faculty workloads</li> <li>• Campuses with similar missions could decide to develop their own norms, and they could assess student work together or provide independent assessment of each other's student work</li> <li>• Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These exams are likely to be less reliable than published exams</li> <li>• Reliability and validity generally are unknown</li> <li>• Creating effective exams requires time and skill</li> <li>• Score exams takes time</li> <li>• Traditional testing methods may not provide authentic measurement</li> <li>• Norms generally are not available</li> </ul>
Embedded assignments and course activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives</li> <li>• Out-of-class assignments are not restricted to time constraints typical for exams</li> <li>• Students are generally motivated to demonstrate the extent of their learning</li> <li>• Can provide authentic assessment of learning objectives</li> <li>• Can involve ratings by fieldwork supervisors</li> <li>• Can provide a context for assessing communication and teamwork skills, as well as other types of learning objectives</li> <li>• Can be used for grading as well as assessment</li> <li>• Faculty who develop the procedures are likely to be interested in results and willing to use them</li> <li>• Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it</li> <li>• Data collection is unobtrusive to students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires time to develop and coordinate</li> <li>• Requires faculty trust that the program will be assessed, not individual teachers</li> <li>• Reliability and validity generally are unknown</li> <li>• Norms generally are not available</li> </ul>

**DIRECT ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES**  
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Technique	Potential Strength	Potential Limitations
Competence interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives</li> <li>• The interview format allows faculty to probe for the breadth and extent of student learning</li> <li>• Can be combined with other techniques that more effectively assess knowledge of facts and terms</li> <li>• Can involve authentic assessment, such as simulated interactions with clients</li> <li>• Can provide for direct assessment of some student skills, such as oral communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires time to develop, coordinate, schedule, and implement</li> <li>• Interview protocols must be carefully developed</li> <li>• Subjective judgments must be guided by agreed-upon criteria</li> <li>• Interviewer training takes time</li> <li>• Interviewing using unstructured interviews requires expertise</li> <li>• Not an efficient way to assess knowledge of specific facts and terms</li> <li>• Some students may be intimidated by the process, reducing their ability to demonstrate their learning</li> </ul>
Portfolios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives</li> <li>• Students are encouraged to take responsibility for and pride in their learning</li> <li>• Students may become more aware of their own academic growth</li> <li>• Can be used for developmental assessment and can be integrated into the advising process to individualize student planning</li> <li>• Can help faculty identify curriculum gaps</li> <li>• Students can use portfolios and the portfolio process to prepare for graduate school or career applications</li> <li>• Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it</li> <li>• Webfolios or CD-ROMs can be easily viewed, duplicated, and stored</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires faculty time to prepare the portfolio assignment and to assist students in preparing portfolios</li> <li>• Requires faculty analysis and, if graded, faculty time to assign grades</li> <li>• May be difficult to motivate students to take the task seriously</li> <li>• May be more difficult for transfer students to assemble the portfolio if they haven't saved relevant materials</li> <li>• Students may refrain from criticizing the program if their portfolio is graded or if their names will be associated with portfolios during the review</li> <li>• It may be difficult to protect student confidentiality and privacy</li> </ul>
Collective portfolios	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can provide direct evidence of student mastery of learning objectives</li> <li>• Students generally are motivated to display the extent of their learning</li> <li>• Workload demands generally are more manageable than traditional portfolios</li> <li>• Students are not required to do extra work</li> <li>• Discussion of results focuses faculty on student learning and program support for it</li> <li>• Data collection is unobtrusive to students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If assignments are not aligned with the objectives being examined, evidence may be problematic</li> <li>• If sampling is not done well, results may not generalize to the entire program</li> <li>• Reviewing the materials takes time and planning</li> </ul>