Quick Reference Guide: Assessment in World Language Programs

**Assessment** is an ongoing process of setting clear goals for student learning and measuring progress towards those goals. It helps teachers make informed decisions about curriculum and instruction, and it guides them in understanding and supporting students' individual needs. World language assessment should be standards- and proficiency-based, and educators are encouraged to use **performance-based tasks**, as these tasks are designed to measure students’ authentic, real-world language use through activities such as role plays, presentations, and interviews involving real-life situations. To make informed decisions about assessments, world language teachers should develop their **language assessment literacy**, including their overall knowledge of assessment, the skills needed to effectively select, develop, and use assessments, and the principles underlying effective assessment practices.

**Performance Assessment**

*Proficiency-based performance assessments are recommended to reflect standards-based instructional practices. It is important to consider a task’s connection to actual target language use in the given context as well as students’ age, developmental, and proficiency levels when incorporating performance assessments in the classroom.*

**Can-Do Approach**

*Assessments should provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they can truly do with the language. An assets-based, can-do approach to assessment may help teachers identify and build upon students’ strengths in the language, creating a positive learning experience.*

Effective Approaches

When using performance-based tasks, educators should choose realistic and age-appropriate scenarios that require students to produce appropriate responses in the target language to meet the needs of the given context. Alternative assessments such as journals, interviews, portfolios, and presentations are also recommended, and these activities can often be individualized for various proficiency levels and student needs. It may also be useful to introduce self-, peer, and/or collaborative assessment practices in the classroom once students have become familiar with task expectations, though these types of assessment should be used in combination with various other classroom-based assessment practices to ensure an accurate understanding of student progress and proficiency. Multimodal approaches to assessment are important in this context, as they allow students to demonstrate what they can do with the language in a variety of ways (e.g., visually, orally, gesturally, etc.) based on their individual needs and preferences, thus increasing the chance for different types of learners to feel successful in the classroom. Teachers should include students in goal-setting, and it may be helpful to share rubrics with students to help them internalize expectations. Expectations and objectives should also be individualized based on student needs and their personal learning goals. Educators are encouraged to incorporate backward design into their teaching practice by considering these learning outcomes and planning for assessment before designing lessons, units, and activities.

Assessment Planning Cycle

1. Develop learning outcomes

2. Assess student performance

3. Analyze results

4. Use results for improvement

Assessing Various Standards

Communication standards should be assessed in an integrated, connected, and sequenced way. One approach to assessing interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational communication is the Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA),[[1]](#footnote-1) which can be modified to simultaneously address multiple communicative modes and standards. This type of assessment includes three thematically connected tasks (e.g., comprehension activity, paired discussion, and presentation), each of which assesses a different communicative mode. It may be helpful to use alternative assessments for the Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities standards, and learning portfolios comprised of various student work samples are recommended for this type of assessment. Educators can also use reflections and evaluations to find out how effectively students prepare for, participate in, and critically engage with learning experiences involving communities where the target language is spoken. In addition, students can be encouraged to compare their attitudes before, during, and after working on social justice projects, as this process can provide evidence of students’ progress in developing various lifelong learning practices.

Technology and Assessment Practices

When conducting technology-enabled assessments, educators should continue to follow best practices for traditional world language assessment, including backward design, goal-setting, and individualizing expectations. Educators should make sure online assessment platforms, applications, and resources are not frustrating for students to use, thus limiting their ability to show what they can truly do with the language. Numerous technology-based learning tools are particularly well suited for world language instruction and assessment due to their ability to connect students to authentic materials and target language-speaking communities around the world. It may be helpful to explore online discussion boards, videos, articles, voice-recording software, conversation exchange websites, and media archives with audio samples in the target language for assessment purposes, especially when administering virtual assessments to students who are learning the language remotely.

Recommendations for Assessment

* Use proficiency-based performance assessments tied to world language content standards
* Consider students’ age, developmental, and proficiency levels when developing assessment tasks
* Use multimodal approaches that allow multiple ways for students to show what they know
* Give students opportunities to feel successful with a variety of assessment methods
* Support students in internalizing expectations and developing appropriate learning goals
* Connect the assessment of different modes of communication through a central theme
  + For interpretive communication, ask students comprehension questions based on something they have read or listened to in class
  + For interpersonal communication, engage students in paired discussions of the same content from the previous task
  + For presentational communication, encourage students to give presentations based on a synthesis of information gathered when completing the previous tasks
* Assess the Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities standards via student portfolios
* Take opportunities to grow your language assessment literacy and knowledge of trends through
  + Professional development offerings, conferences, and workshops
  + Online courses, publications, and other resources from test publishers and institutions such as [Title VI Language Resource Centers](https://www.nflrc.org/)

For more research and a full bibliography for this and other QRG topics, see

[World Language Standards Literature Review Report](https://www.doe.mass.edu/worldlanguages/leader-network/literature-review.docx).

1. May also be referred to as Integrated Proficiency Assessment [↑](#footnote-ref-1)