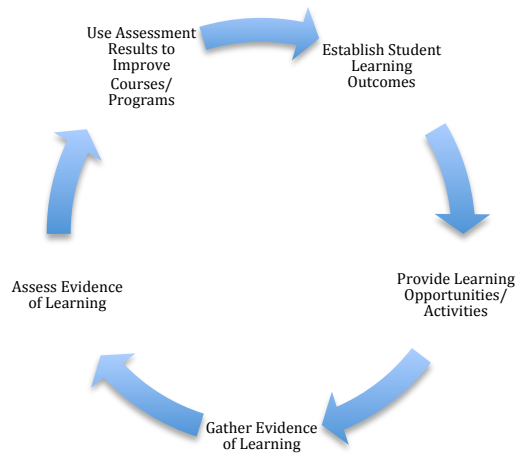


Assessing Learning

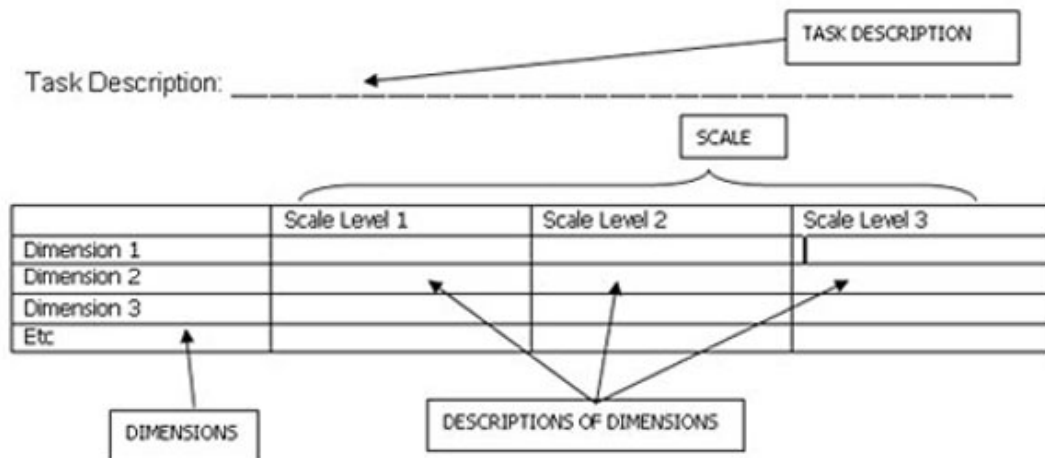
In education, “assessment” refers to the systematic process of collecting and using information about student learning. Assessment can take place within individual courses, across educational programs (such as general education), and across degree programs. Though it is cyclical and recursive, assessment always begins with the careful and deliberate identification of student learning outcomes (SLOs). Learning outcomes are the results of some intentional activity—at a university, these results usually come from a combination of instruction and self-directed activity on the part of the student. Outcomes are the ends, rather than the means, of educational activities, and identify the knowledge, skills, and attitudes/beliefs that students are expected to possess or exhibit upon successful completion of a course, program, major, or co-curricular activity. Assessment is often depicted as a five-step cycle:



1. **Establish Student Learning Outcomes:** Begin by composing clear statements of your learning outcomes, using active verbs. Use active verbs to make learning outcomes **observable, measurable, and capable of being demonstrated**. Click [here](#) for more guidance on how to write learning outcomes.
2. **Provide Learning Opportunities/Activities:** Design intentional activities for students—readings, problem sets, classroom exercises and activities, assignments, and examinations—that provide students with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes/beliefs specified by the learning outcomes. The work that students complete will constitute the **evidence** of their learning, so take care to create assignments and activities that accurately reflect and directly relate to the outcomes. The process of linking individual elements of a course, certificate, or degree program to overarching learning outcomes is called **curriculum mapping**.

3. **Gather Evidence of Learning:** Best practice in assessment recommends gathering at least two measures of how well your students are achieving the learning outcomes you have identified for your course, certificate, or degree program.
 - a. As much as possible, assessment of student learning should be **direct**: that is, based on works students complete for classes, such as essays, examinations, projects, presentations, and portfolios.
 - b. Direct assessment can be supplemented by **indirect** measures, such as individual student surveys or focus group interviews, in which students reflect on how well they feel they learned course, certificate, or degree outcomes.

4. **Assess Evidence of Learning:** Assessment of learning via examinations is straightforward: the percentage of students who answer questions correctly is tallied, which indexes the degree to which the outcome is achieved. Assessing learning as demonstrated by essays, projects, and presentations is most frequently accomplished through the use of **rubrics**, which assessors use to gauge student accomplishment of **dimensions**. Below is a diagram of a rubric:



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The best rubrics are **descriptive**: by providing descriptions of the performance traits that merit each rating scale, descriptive rubrics make expectations explicit, while providing convincing documentation of student performance, both individually and in aggregate. The sample rubric below was developed to grade oral presentations:

¹ Source: <http://www.assessment.uconn.edu/primer/how1.html>.

ANALYTIC rubric for grading oral presentations
(Assessing Academic Programs in Higher Education by Allen 2004)

	Below expectation	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Score
Organization	No apparent organization. Evidence is not used to support assertions. (0 – 2)	The presentation has a focus and provides some evidence that supports conclusions. (3 – 5)	The presentation is carefully organized and provides convincing evidence to support conclusions (6 – 8)	
Content	The content is inaccurate or overly general. Listeners are unlikely to learn anything or may be misled. (0 – 2)	The content is generally accurate, but incomplete. Listeners may learn some isolated facts, but they are unlikely to gain new insights about the topic. (5 – 7)	The content is accurate and complete. Listeners are likely to gain new insights about the topic. (10 – 13)	
Style	The speaker appears anxious and uncomfortable, and reads notes, rather than speaks. Listeners are largely ignored. (0 – 2)	The speaker is generally relaxed and comfortable, but too often relies on notes. Listeners are sometimes ignored or misunderstood. (3 – 6)	The speaker is relaxed and comfortable, speaks without undue reliance on notes, and interacts effectively with listeners. (7 – 9)	
Total Score				

5. **Use Assessment Results to Improve Courses/Programs:** The purpose of writing and assessing student learning outcomes is the improvement of student learning. After gathering information, assessing it according to the methods you have defined (i.e., examinations, rubrics, indirect assessments such as surveys and focus groups), ask yourself:
- What are the students learning well? What are they struggling with learning?
 - What steps can be taken to improve student performance on aspects of the course or program with which they are struggling?
 - How can courses or programs change in order to address the specific difficulties students are experiencing in the course or program?