

The Joy of (Performance) Assessment

How can librarians **assess** student learning in a way that is **organic** to the assignment and instruction session, yet gives results that are **comparable** across classes?

Performance Assessment:

A qualitative method of assessment in which students demonstrate learning by completing specific tasks related to targeted learning outcomes. Performance Assessment encourages real-life application of skills and is well-suited to an information literacy program in which concepts carry more weight than the mechanics of searching.

How it Works:

Identify an information literacy skill to assess.

"Determine which kinds of information are appropriate for a research topic."

Design a common activity targeted to that skill.

A "Source Evaluation Activity" asks students to locate, cite, and defend one source addressing their specific research question.

Deliver an instruction session designed to teach students the skill.

Show examples of two different sources and ask which is a better choice for the assignment.

Hold a class discussion about the "clues" that help determine a source's credibility and audience.

Review and chart students' completed performance assessments.

The librarians meet to compare their teaching methods and results, to identify trends in student understanding of the skill, and to brainstorm more effective means of teaching the skill in the future.

Adjust method of teaching the skill -- and administering the assessment -- for greater student success.

Ask students to identify the type of source they choose, and place greater emphasis on their justification for its selection.

When approaching faculty, present the assessment as a way to address problems students encounter when doing research.

Since 2011, the Augustana College instruction librarians have been using performance assessment to evaluate their work with a three-term sequence of required first-year general education classes ("Liberal Studies First Year" or LSFY). Replacing a fixed-choice, quantitative information literacy test, performance assessment has allowed the librarians to compare results across different assignments taught by different instructors in the LSFY sequence in order to identify -- and therefore address -- strengths and challenges in students' research abilities.

Here is an example of a performance assessment that the librarians used with LSFY 101 classes in order to assess the information literacy skill "Use reference materials to select a topic and to locate reliable background information."

Name _____

Using the Reference Collection

What topic / area do you want to learn more about? [What topic are you exploring right now? What is your topic? etc.]

Using the blue Library of Congress (LC) Classification guide, identify two areas to browse for information about your topic:

1. _____ 2. [optional if short on time] _____

Go to one of those areas and browse the titles. Choose one and write the title and call number (located on the spine of the book).

Title: _____

Call number: _____

Using the index and/or Table of Contents in the book you select, locate the volume(s) and/or page number(s) that address your topic:

Volume(s): _____ Page number(s): _____

Now, read about your topic. Write a summary of what you learn here:

Using the call number of the book, find another book on your topic in the Stacks area of the collection:

Title: _____

Call number: _____

Highlights of Performance Assessment:

- fully integrated into the class session
- useful to students (gives them a possible source(s) for an assignment)
- provides information about concepts librarians most commonly teach, thus directly fueling improvement in their work

For more information about performance assessment, we recommend:

Oakleaf, Megan. "Dangers and Opportunities: A Conceptual Map of Information Literacy Assessment Approaches." *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 8.3 (2008): 233-253. Web.

