Alternative Assessment Strategies*

By,

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**Portfolio-based assessments:** Allow students to compile a collection of independent work that he or she feels highlights the process of completed work. This can include rough drafts, revised assignments, problem sets, or anything that shows continual growth or thought process that meets specific curricular goals. An additional advantage of portfolio-based assessment is that it enables students to open a dialogue with their instructor to reflect on the pieces they have chosen.

**Sample Memorandum or Briefing:** Students prepare a short (1-2pgs.) where they address a central problem, outline multiple solutions to the problem, succinctly state the pros and cons of each possible solution, and make a final recommendation. One advantage of using the memo or briefing as an assessment strategy is that it naturally lends itself to scaffolding. For example, a student can submit the assignment (or present it to the class) prior to making their final recommendation, so that they have a chance to highlight their thought processes. To adapt for courses such as mathematics, students can prepare a brief on how they went about solving the problem.

**Be The Teacher:** Students prepare a selection of works they have read during the term as a thematic anthology—they create the theme, choose the works, write a paragraph introduction to each, and an introduction. This assignment forces students to evaluate each selected work, think critically about unifying themes, and think about order so that works build properly upon each other.

**Fact Sheet/Buzzfeed List-icle:** This assessment strategy can be implemented in many disciplines. Students are tasked with creating information they feel the public needs to know about a given topic (COVID-19, the impact of bioaccumulation, etc.). In order to compile their facts, students can use databases or secondary literature, then evaluate the relevant information, and write brief (one sentence) facts. Students can also prepare a brief explanation for the instructor outlining the reasons why they chose the facts they included.

**Op-Ed Article:** Have students select an issue covered in class and write an article outlining their position for a local newspaper. This assignment allows students to synthesize information, articulate their own perspective, and take newspaper audience into account. This assignment also affords a unique opportunity for peer evaluation, as students can share their Op-Eds, and make determinations as to whom they found to be persuasive and why.

**Guidelines for Constructing Alternative Assessments**
1. Define the instructional outcome you want to assess as clearly and unambiguously as possible in terms of both the subject-matter content and the set of skills or operations that a skillful performer would exhibit.

2. Distinguish between those outcomes that can validly be assessed solely by performance assessments and those that can be assessed just as effectively by objective measures.

3. Create tasks that elicit evidence of the student’s ability to perform the targeted skill.

4. Decide what kinds of teacher guidance can be used while still allowing students the freedom to learn and do it their own way.

5. Try out the assessment and make revisions as necessary.

*Adapted from The Center for Teaching and Learning, The University of California, Berkley and Brigham Young University*