CREATING EFFECTIVE PRACTICE ASSESSMENTS

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN
extended
campus

INTRODUCTION

Educational research has shown that students consistently demonstrate lower test anxiety and perform better on evaluated assessments when they complete practice assessments first. Practice exercises are, therefore, useful tools, particularly when they precede challenging assessments.

A CLOSER LOOK

The most effective practice assessments:

- Are similar in format and content to evaluated assessments
- Specify which learning objectives they cover
- Provide feedback on correct and incorrect responses
- Encourage learners to think beyond simply which answer is correct or incorrect and to analyze why

Practice assessments can take several forms depending on your instructional goals.

Method	If You Want To…	Suggested Type of Practice Assessment	Tips
Explanatory Feedback	Help students learn new content, **building from simpler to more complex** concepts with supporting feedback.	**Practice quiz with feedback through hints.** This allows students to get feedback and ideas as they move through questions.	• Control how many questions students can see at once so they must process feedback from one question before moving to the next. • Mention learning resources where appropriate, such as articles or chapter numbers.
Drill	Help students **memorize or drill** terms or processes (vocabulary, mathematical functions, etc.).	**Automatically graded multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank self assessments.** These allow students to see immediately whether or not they have chosen the correct answer.	• Break large amounts of content into smaller quizzes of 10 to 20 questions.
Readiness Check	Help students **assess their readiness** for a formative or summative assessment.	**Automatically graded quiz.** This provides feedback only after students submit the entire quiz for grading.	• Only objective questions (true/false, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, etc.) can be automatically graded. • You can draw questions for practice assessments from the same question bank used for graded assessments, and then choose how much to reveal. For example, students can see which questions they answered incorrectly, without seeing the answers.

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EXAMPLES

Scenario 1: Explanatory Feedback Method

The author of an American history course used a series of small writing practice exercises to help students meet learning goals such as identifying time periods and citing supporting evidence. The following practice question focuses on using specific categories when naming groups of people. No matter what the student enters, the following feedback is generated for the student to check their answer.

Name three or more distinct groups within American society who played a part in, and were impacted by, these economic and social changes.

Your Answer:

Industrialists, factory workers, and immigrants.

There were a lot of good potential answers here, which might have included factory workers, wealth industrialists, immigrants, farmers, ranchers, miners, city dwellers, or African Americans. Again, this is only a partial list. The key thing this question was trying to get you to think about is that the catchall phrase "Americans" is often so vague that it isn't very useful. When writing essays, be sure to clarify exactly which Americans' thoughts and experiences you are explaining. Only rarely did all Americans experience or think exactly the same thing. Be sure to consider how race, gender, and socioeconomic status influenced the way different Americans experienced this period of history.

Scenario 2: Readiness Check Method

The author of a world religions course wanted to help students determine their readiness for formative assessments. To maintain alignment between the practice and evaluated assessments, the practice quizzes drew their questions from the same question bank used for an evaluated assessment. After submitting the quiz, students could see the questions they answered incorrectly and were encouraged to research these areas in more detail. In this example, question 2 was answered incorrectly, but the correct answer was not automatically identified. The student will have another chance to take the quiz after some more research to identify the correct answer.

Incorrect | Question 2 | 0 / 1 pts

How does religion scholar George Lindbeck define religion?

○ Religion refers to belief in a supreme being.

○ Religion refers to ones primary worldview and how this dictates one's thoughts and actions.

○ Religion is a dangerous system of beliefs that drives whole societies to kill for these beliefs.

○ Religion is primarily concerned with rituals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Seven Practices for Effective Learning by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Feedback enhances the positive effects and reduces the negative effects of multiple-choice testing by *Memory & Cognition*
- Improving students' learning with effective learning techniques: Promising directions from cognitive and educational psychology by *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*
- Practice tests as formative assessment improve student performance on computer-managed learning assessments by *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*