

# CREATING EFFECTIVE PRACTICE ASSESSMENTS

## INTRODUCTION

Educational research has shown that students consistently demonstrate lower test anxiety and perform better on evaluated assessments when they complete practice assessments first, making such practice exercises useful tools, particularly for 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, 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, <b>building from simpler to more complex</b> concepts with supporting feedback.	<b>Practice quiz with feedback through hints.</b> This allows students to get feedback and ideas as they move through questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control how many questions students can see at once so they must process feedback from one question before moving to the next.</li> <li>• Mention learning resources where appropriate, such as articles or chapter numbers.</li> </ul>
Drill	Help students <b>memorize or drill</b> terms or processes (vocabulary, mathematical functions, etc.).	<b>Automatically graded multiple-choice or fill-in-the-blank self-assessments.</b> These allow students to see immediately whether or not they have chosen the correct answer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Break large amounts of content into smaller quizzes of 10 to 20 questions.</li> </ul>
Readiness Check	Help students <b>assess their readiness</b> for a formative or summative assessment.	<b>Automatically graded quiz.</b> This provides feedback only after students submit the entire quiz for grading.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only objective questions (true/false, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank, etc.) can be automatically graded.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>

## 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.

**Question 2**

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

▼ [Hide](#) [Check my answer](#)

There were a lot of good potential answers here, which might have included factory workers, wealthy 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 draw their questions from the same question bank used for an evaluated assessment.

However, students can see only the questions they answered incorrectly, and are encouraged to research these areas in more detail. In this example, questions 1 through 3 were answered correctly, so the student sees only questions 4 and 5.

**Submission View**

Below you can see the questions that you answered incorrectly. Take some time to review these and use the learning resources provided with this competency set or conduct an Internet search to discover the correct answers before taking the proctored exam.

**randomizer**

**Question 4**

How does religion scholar George Lindbeck define religion?

- Religion refers to belief in a supreme being.
- Religion refers to one's 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.

**Question 5**

Like all the sacred mountains important to perspectives East and West, Mount Kailasa is sacred to Jains, Hindus, and Buddhists. Among the great deities who are said to reside there, which **Hindu** deity is the multi-armed and the most famous among them?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Seven Practices for Effective Learning: <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov05/vol63/num03/Seven-Practices-for-Effective-Learning.aspx>.

Butler, A. C., & Roediger, H. L. (2008). Feedback enhances the positive effects and reduces the negative effects of multiple-choice testing. *Memory & Cognition*, 36, 604–616.

Dunlosky, J., Rawson, K. A., Marsh, E. J., Nathan, M. J., & Willingham, D. T. (2013). Improving Students' Learning With Effective Learning Techniques: Promising Directions From Cognitive and Educational Psychology. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 14(1), 4–58. Summary available at <http://www.ernweb.com/educational-research-articles/learning-techniques-effective-study/>.

Sly, L. (1999). Practice Tests as Formative Assessment Improve Student Performance on Computer-Managed Learning Assessments. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*. doi:10.1080/0260293990240307