

Authentic and Performance-Based Assessment

Category: Assessment, Feedback and Learning

Performance-based assessment requires learners to produce, perform or demonstrate something observable rather than only selecting an answer. Authentic assessment additionally asks how meaningfully the assessment resembles the knowledge, judgement and constraints of disciplinary, professional or civic practice. The terms overlap, but they are not synonymous.

Authenticity is a matter of degree and fit, not simply realism. It can be examined through the task, physical and social contexts, form of the result and criteria by which performance is judged ([Gulikers et al., 2004](#)).

Design Dimensions

1. **Purposeful task:** Elicit meaningful application, inquiry, judgement or creation rather than recall alone.
2. **Context:** Represent relevant tools, information, uncertainty, audiences and practical constraints.
3. **Performance:** Require an observable product, process, explanation or demonstration of capability.
4. **Criteria:** Judge qualities valued in the discipline while making standards sufficiently intelligible.
5. **Feasibility and equity:** Manage workload, access, safety and reasonable adjustments without weakening the construct.

Examples in Practice

Instead of answering isolated questions about public-health communication, students prepare a brief for a local organisation, justify choices with evidence and respond to stakeholder questions. Individual reflections reveal reasoning within the group product.

Why It Matters

Well-designed performance assessment can reveal whether learners can integrate knowledge under credible conditions. Authenticity should nevertheless serve the learning outcome: surface simulation, workplace branding or an elaborate scenario does not automatically produce valid assessment. Designers should therefore consider whose practice is represented, whether learners have equitable access to required resources, and how much scaffolding preserves authenticity without changing the intended capability or unfairly increasing irrelevant difficulty for participants ([Palm, 2008](#)).

Further Reading

6. Gulikers, J. T. M., Bastiaens, T. J., & Kirschner, P. A. (2004). [A five-dimensional framework for authentic assessment](#). Educational Technology Research and Development, 52(3), 67–86.
7. Gulikers, J. T. M., Bastiaens, T. J., & Kirschner, P. A. (2006). [Authentic assessment, student and teacher perceptions: The practical value of the five-dimensional framework](#). Journal of Vocational Education & Training, 58(3), 337–357.
8. Palm, T. (2008). [Performance assessment and authentic assessment: A conceptual analysis of the literature](#). Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation, 13, Article 4.

Related Terms: Constructive Alignment | Competency-Based Assessment | Project-Based Learning | Assessment Validity