6

Ongoing Assessment
Ongoing assessment is a term that signals that assessment should be diverse and happening all the time. Through their own development and everyday experiences with literacy and learning but also through instruction, students change and learn all of the time. As a result, teachers need to continually update their knowledge about what students are experiencing in and out of school, what students know and can do, and how teachers can create contexts for students to become more literate and learn. The task of creating assessment that is ongoing and informative can be particularly challenging in this era of high standards and accountability.

Classroom assessments are particularly useful, including day-to-day conversations with students, observations, and reviews of classroom work and classroom test performance. These often overlooked kinds of assessment provide a rich, classroom-based picture of students’ literacies and learning. Teachers use these tests to plan instruction as well as to determine how well students have learned.
Other kinds of assessment, such as state tests and standardized tests, are used for **high-stakes purposes**. The term *high-stakes* literally means that tests are employed to assess accountability—whether teachers, students, and schools are meeting high standards—and assign penalties if they are not. For example, because of the current educational reforms, poor performance on state assessments in some states can mean reassigning or firing teachers, loss of resources, or school closings. For students, performance on a high-stakes assessment can mean the difference between passing or failing a grade or even graduating from high school.

Ironically, in comparison with classroom observations and assessments, the general public tends to offer greater credibility to high-stakes, standardized tests and state and national assessments that are developed by using standard procedures. However, classroom assessments often provide immediate clues for what students need and what teachers need to do to create the best conditions for learning. Classroom assessments also provide useful information about how students might perform on state tests.

For teachers, decisions about assessments are not best represented by an either/or choice—between either classroom assessments or tests used for high-stakes purposes. In this era of standards and accountability, teachers need to use all of the assessment tools available, all the time, for a variety of purposes—hence the need for assessment that is ongoing. The purpose of this chapter is to help you develop and use assessment in ongoing ways to understand and meet students’ literacy needs and create effective contexts for learning for today’s learners. A key message of this chapter is to build on patterns within assessment information about students’ motivation, knowledge, and skill in content area literacy. The Connecting Standards and Assessment feature identifies some ways to stay informed about different kinds of assessments, their purposes and applications.

Chapter 2 presented a model (Figure 2.1) for the many ways adolescents know and practice literacy. Here, that model will be used to construct a rationale for using different kinds of tests. Figure 6.1 depicts a chart comparing the ways in which adolescents know and practice literacy (from Figure 2.1) with various techniques available for assessing adolescent literacy, presented in this chapter. The shaded areas represent points of intersection—places where the characteristics of adolescents and their literacy learning are assessed by particular assessment techniques.

Of course, no single assessment is sufficient for determining what students care about, know, and are able to do with respect to their literacies, content knowledge, and practices. An important guideline is to use
multiple assessments and look for patterns in students’ performance. Do not over rely on results from any single test.

Another important point is to consider carefully how to assess in light of different students’ needs. The Teaching Today’s Learners feature on page 163 discusses how to make assessment accommodations for students with special educational needs and for English language learners.

In the following sections, assessments depicted in Figure 6.1 are described and illustrated. The chapter starts with assessments that help teachers to understand students—their personal identity, how they see themselves and their peers, and their academic performance. These assessments include conversations, interviews, surveys, and observations.

With so much emphasis on testing these days, it is challenging to keep up with all of the changes. It is particularly important for teachers to keep up with tests that are used for high-stakes purposes, such as state assessments used to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind. Tests that are used for high-stakes purposes are often employed to reform schools, usually at a time of educational crisis. Knee-jerk reactions without much forethought are the unfortunate result of many high-stakes efforts. Assessments can be misinterpreted or applied inappropriately when used in crisis mode. The use of assessments tends to fall into two categories: those used to garner snapshots of students progress and those used to assess students’ growth. Growth-oriented assessments involve multiple observations of a student’s performance over time. An ongoing challenge is to integrate many different kinds of assessments with curriculum standards, especially because state tests do not always accurately reflect state standards.

Other than the National Assessment of Educational Progress, there are few, if any, national tests. Most testing occurs at the state level to comply with No Child Left Behind. Many districts and schools employ a wide variety of local and classroom-based assessments for a variety of purposes. An effective plan for ongoing assessment is to emphasize growth and achievement. It is important to communicate about assessment with respect to appropriate purposes, and one-shot tests say little about growth, and multiple classroom observations may not say enough about achievement. Consider your audience carefully when communicating assessment information.

The next set of assessments is focused on academics—the content area reading inventory, classroom tests, and portfolio assessments. The chapter concludes with useful information about understanding, interpreting, and applying information from state tests and standardized tests.

### Personal Assessments

Conversations, interviews, surveys, and observations are some of the best ways to get to know students as individuals, what their experiences are like in the classroom, how they approach learning, and how they view...
The following guidelines are for assessing students with special needs and English language learners respectively. Describe some ways of making accommodations like this for assessment in your content area.

For students with special educational needs (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 1997):
- Administer the test individually or to a small group in a separate location
- Administer the test in a location with minimal distractions
- Provide the test on audiotape
- Increase spacing between test items or reduce items per page or line
- Increase the size of answer spaces
- Highlight key words or phrases in the directions
- Provide cues (e.g., arrows and stop signs) on the answer form
- Allow a flexible schedule
- Extend the time allotted to complete the test
- Allow frequent breaks during testing
- Administer the test in several sessions, specifying the duration of each session
- Administer the test over several days, specifying the duration for each day’s session

For English language learners (Butler & Stevens, 1997):
- Extra assessment time
- Breaks during the test
- Administration over several sessions
- Oral directions in the native language
- Small-group administration
- Use of dictionaries
- Reading aloud of questions in English
- Answers written directly in the test booklet
- Directions read aloud or explained

Teaching Today’s Learners

Making Assessment Accommodations

Teaching themselves in multiple ways in and outside of school. Knowing more about students as individuals will help with teaching and learning in at least three ways:

- Motivating students by bringing their backgrounds and prior knowledge into classroom lessons
- Helping students to make connections between their lives and academic texts and concepts
- Guiding students to use their backgrounds and life experiences to critically read and evaluate academic texts and texts from popular culture (mass media, film, music, sports, and the Internet)
For secondary teachers, knowing students individually can be a challenging task. For this reason, this section will address various ways of learning about students through daily opportunities for assessment.

**Classroom Conversations**

One of the most readily available ways of learning about students is through conversations. A prime opportunity for learning about students is by asking them questions while they work. Some sample questions to ask students while they work are the following:

- What are you thinking about as you work on this?
- What steps are you taking to get this done?
- How are you using reading or writing?
- How are you using research? How are you using the Internet?

Sometimes, conversational opportunities emerge when students are experiencing difficulty. When students experience difficulties with their work, ask: Where are you stuck? and What do you suppose you could do to solve this problem? Other times, teachers can create opportunities by asking students to guide them in their approach to their work. To get students to guide you in understanding their work, ask questions such as: How are you doing this? and What will you do if you get stuck on this?

Students who are uncertain about their approach to their work or who get stuck with little, if any, sense of their alternatives could be experiencing a number of problems, such as not knowing much about the content or being inexperienced in ways of knowing in the content area. They may even be struggling with reading, writing, and communicating. Be especially observant for signs that students are uncertain or stuck and have few, if any, options for solving their problems with learning.

**Classroom Observations**

Classroom observations nicely complement classroom conversations. In the course of an hour each day, students are called upon to perform in various ways—responding to questions, reading aloud, solving problems, doing labs, translating, interpreting, explaining, representing, and evaluating. During these performances, watch carefully not only for signs that students understand the content, but also for ways in which they engage in these learning activities.

For some students, it is no great stretch to move from one kind of text and task to another. For other students, anxiety, hesitation, and
uncertainty during these activities can reflect problems with content knowledge, a lack of connection between a student’s prior knowledge and the content, low motivation, and indecision about how to learn. Be cautious about making universal assumptions. Just because a student shows mastery of one topic or set of concepts is no guarantee of a repeat performance, just as problems in one content area are no reliable predictor of problems everywhere else. Watch for patterns of performance and compare with other teaching and learning situations and assessments.

**Interviews**

Some teachers find that interviews are the best way to learn about students in and out of school. However, with 140 or more students a day, it is unreasonable to expect that teachers can interview every student on a regular basis. Some teachers have found a useful compromise by interviewing focus groups of students, small groups that reflect a representative sample of students across the school day. Some useful student interview questions appear in Figure 6.2 (adapted from Moje et al., 2004).

**Figure 6.2**
Useful student interview questions.

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**For learning in your content area:**

- What is the last thing you learned in science? What have you learned so far in social studies? What was your favorite book last year in English? What do you like to do in art class? What is your favorite subject? What is your least favorite subject?
- Are you a good reader in (content area)?
- Are you a good writer in (content area)?
- How do you feel about talking in front of the class? Participating in a group discussion?
- Do you know anyone who is really good in (content area)? What does this person do that makes him or her so good in (content area)?
- When you are reading/writing/studying in (content area), what do you do when you come to something you do not know?
- Tell me about a time when you really felt successful in (content area).
- Tell me about a time when you really felt unsuccessful in (content area).

**For favorite outside-of-school literacy experiences:**

- What have you read lately? What are you writing? What music are you listening to? What music do you play? Tell me your favorite song. Why do you like it? What makes rap different from jazz? What is your favorite movie?

**For goals for the future:**

- What do you want to do when you graduate from high school?
Parents can also provide useful insights about your students’ literacy and approach to learning in your content area. Although parent conferences can be some of the most challenging experiences for beginning teachers, conferences are important opportunities to learn more about your students as well as to explain your curriculum, your classroom, and your expectations. Figure 6.3 depicts some useful interview questions for parents.

**Reading Attitude and Interest Surveys**

Yet another option consists of developing and administering reading attitude and interest surveys. Surveys are quick to administer and interpret. **Reading attitudes** are all about feelings of approaching or avoiding situations involving reading. Students’ attitudes toward reading affect their engagement and reading practices. Poor attitudes can be responsible for students choosing not to read, regardless of their reading skill (McKenna et al., 1995). **Reading interests** involve preferences for reading different kinds of reading materials. Interest is often responsible for students’ motivation to read specific kinds of materials. Lack of interest can be the reason for students’ resistance to some kinds of materials. Research has suggested that schools need to do a much better job of making interesting reading materials available for middle and high school students (Worthy et al., 1999).

Success in promoting students’ engagement in reading requires that teachers know as much as they can about students’ reading attitudes and interests. Once teachers are aware of students’ likes and dislikes and their preferences for different kinds of reading, the teachers are in a better position to use reading to start a unit of study, focus or stimulate discussion, or supplement classroom textbooks according to students’ interests.

Many tools are available for assessing reading attitudes and interests. One is to simply observe students to find out about the reading materials they enjoy. Other techniques include observing comments students make about their reading preferences in their classroom writings. The techniques depicted here involve administering reading attitude surveys and interest inventories. For example, Figures 6.4 and 6.5

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**Figure 6.3**

Questions to ask parents about their adolescent children (students).

Tell me about (your student). What has it been like for him or her in school? What has it been like for him or her in (content area)?

Does (your student) talk about any favorite subjects in school?

What does (your student) like to do after school? Does it ever involve reading or writing?

Does (your student) spend any time on the Internet? If so, what kinds of Internet sites does (your student) enjoy?
When you are reading and you come to something you don’t know, what do you do?
Do you ever do anything else?
Who do you know who is a good reader?
What makes him or her a good reader?
Do you think she or he ever comes to something she or he doesn’t know when reading?
If your answer is yes, what do you think he or she does about it?
What do you think is the best way to help someone who doesn’t read well?
How did you learn to read? What do you remember? What helped you to learn?
What would you like to do better as a reader?
Describe yourself as a reader.
Using a scale of 5 to 1, with 5 being a terrific reader, what overall rating would you give yourself as a reader?

I like reading stories.
I am not interested in books.
I like reading comics or magazines.
I like reading poems.
I think reading is difficult.
I like reading silently by myself.
I like watching TV better than reading books.
I don’t like reading at home.
I like going to the library.
I like reading information books.
I like reading with an adult to help me.
I enjoy reading.
I think reading is boring.

Which of these do you read at home?

- Storybooks
- Comics
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Information books
- Poems

Others at home read with me.

How often do you read at home?

- Every day
- Most days
- Not often
- Never

**Figure 6.4**
Surveying general attitudes about reading with open-ended questions.

**Figure 6.5**
Surveying general attitudes about reading using a simple scale.
represent two different ways of constructing a reading attitude survey: one as an open-ended questionnaire (Goodman et al., 1987) and the other as a simple survey (Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004). There are advantages to both approaches. The open-ended questions invite students to share their feelings in their own words. This can be particularly beneficial in learning about students who struggle with reading. The simple attitude survey has the advantage of quick administration and easy interpretation.

Figure 6.6 depicts an attitude survey crafted for English language learners (Yamashita, 2004). Notice how the items have been adapted to reflect attitudes toward reading in a student’s first language and then reading in English. This reflects the possibility that students might feel perfectly comfortable about reading in their first language yet feel anxiety about reading in English.

Figure 6.7 contains a survey for assessing students’ reading interests (Worthy et al., 1999). Notice especially the way in which this survey is administered. Students might not know the terminology used on the survey, including young adult adventure or biography. To help students respond, the elements of the survey are read out loud and discussed so that students can answer on the basis of their experiences. Notice also how the interest inventory asks students to name some preferences for specific kinds of books. Knowing about students’ favorite books and authors can help teachers to incorporate those reading materials into daily classroom practice.

Content Assessment

Content Area Reading Inventory

A Content Area Literacy Inventory is especially useful when teachers want to directly observe how students deal with content area readings and assignments, including writing (Vacca & Vacca, 2004). Designed as a dry run in interacting with a class textbook or other kinds of content area texts and classroom tasks, a Content Area Reading Inventory is a particularly good tool to determine how students understand classroom work and assignments in your class. Content Area Reading Inventories can be given to individual students, but they are most often administered to an entire class. The results of a Content Area Reading Inventory can provide teachers with an indication of how well prepared students might be for reading and writing in a content area and what steps teachers might need to take to help students.
**Figure 6.6** Surveying the reading attitudes of English language learners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- I feel anxious if I don’t know all of the words.
- I feel anxious if I don’t know all of the words in English.
- If it is not necessary, I prefer to avoid reading as much as possible.
- If it is not necessary, I prefer to avoid reading in English as much as possible.
- I think reading many books is advantageous to getting a job.
- I think reading many books in English is advantageous to getting a job.
- Reading is enjoyable.
- Reading in English is enjoyable.
- Reading is my hobby.
- Reading in English is my hobby.
- I think reading many books is advantageous to the study of this subject.
- I think reading many books in English is advantageous to the study of this subject.
- I feel anxious if I am not sure whether I understand what I read.
- I feel anxious if I am not sure whether I understand what I read in English.
- I feel tired when I am presented with a long text.
- I feel tired when I am presented with a long text in English.
- I think reading many books enables us to gain more knowledge.
- I think reading many books in English enables us to gain more knowledge.
- I think reading is useful to shape my personality.
- I think reading in English is useful to shape my personality.
- I think I can read quickly.
- I think I can read in English quickly.
- I think my reading ability is advanced.
- I think my reading ability in English is advanced.
- I think I read a lot.
- I think I read in English a lot.
Preparing a Content Area Reading Inventory. To prepare a Content Area Reading Inventory, follow these steps:

1. **Select a reading assignment for students.** This can be just about anything, including reading pages from a book, doing math or science work, studying pages from a social studies text, or doing research in the library or on the Internet.

**Part I:** Which of the following kinds of reading material would you be most interested in reading? Please listen as each item is read and discussed. Then put a check by those materials that you would choose to read if they were available and you had time to read. If you have a comment or want to write in a title, you may do so underneath each item. Raise your hand if you have any questions.

1. ___ Young adult literature novels
2. ___ Young adult funny novels
3. ___ Young adult novels about things that happen to people
4. ___ Young adult novels about science fiction or fantasy
5. ___ Scary books
6. ___ Biography
7. ___ Series books
8. ___ Information books or magazines about sports
9. ___ Magazines about people
10. ___ Information books and magazines about cars and trucks
11. ___ Books that are mostly for adults
12. ___ Poetry books
13. ___ Encyclopedias or books that give information about different things
14. ___ Young adult novels about things that happen to people
15. ___ Almanacs or record books
16. ___ Cartoons or comics
17. ___ Drawing books
18. ___ Animals
19. ___ History or historical fiction
20. ___ Information books: science and math
21. ___ Picture books
22. ___ Other books or magazines

___ Write your favorite title(s) or author(s)

**Part II:** Please listen as the following questions are read. Then answer them. Raise your hand if you have any questions.

1. If you could read anything that you wanted to read, what would it be?
2. Who is your favorite author?
3. Where do you usually get your reading materials (circle one)
   - school library
   - public library
   - store
   - home
   - classroom
   - other

---

Figure 6.7 Surveying students’ reading interests.
2. Have the student or students read some of the assignment. Ask: What do you need to do with this assignment? How will you get started? What will you need to do to be successful?

3. After students complete the assignment, ask them to describe what they did and how they thought that it helped them.

4. Observe students’ use of text aids, such as graphs, problems, and questions inserted in the text. Most students, particularly struggling readers, skip text aids. Some good readers skip text aids because they can get enough meaning from the rest of the text. Select a text aid and ask the student or students to tell you what it is for and what it is telling him or her.

An alternative to this approach is to prepare specific questions about the classroom text, using a form like the one in Figure 6.8 (Vacca & Vacca, 2004).

Teachers in performance-oriented content areas might adapt this inventory to students’ performance skills, such as speaking and writing in a foreign language, recognizing and responding to musical notation, explaining a method of physical conditioning, or demonstrating an artistic technique. All teachers can gain a great deal of insight from this form of assessment by having students talk about what they are doing while they are performing a particular skill.

Evaluating Students’ Performance. Evaluating how students perform on a Content Area Reading Inventory involves following these steps:

1. Observe problems with reading, writing, and other various ways of responding and performing. For instance, does the student spend an inordinate amount of time trying to figure out the text or understand the task or assignment? Does the student gain much understanding for the effort she or he is expending on reading or writing? Does the student stumble over particular topics or kinds of tasks?

2. Determine whether the students are more concerned with procedure or are engaged in the content. Procedural concerns include pronouncing the words, filling in blanks, and just getting the assignment done. Signs of engagement in the content include talking about the content, asking questions about the content, or summarizing the important concepts.
Mathematics
Read pages 98–103 in your mathematics textbook. Then look up at the clock and record the time when you finished reading. Record this time in the space provided on the response sheet. Close your book and answer the first question. Then open your book and answer the remaining questions.

Finished reading time:______________________

STUDENT RESPONSE FORM

Part I. Directions: Close your book. Answer the following question on the back of this sheet. What was this reading selection about? Use as much space on the back of this sheet as you need to complete your answer.

Part II.

A. Directions: Open your book and answer the following questions:

1. The United States stayed only with the English system of measurement.
   a. True
   b. False
   c. Can’t tell

2. The metric system is used in many other fields besides science.
   a. True
   b. False
   c. Can’t tell

3. An inch is larger than a centimeter.
   a. True
   b. False
   c. Can’t tell

4. The ruler on page 99 uses two different kinds of measurements.
   a. True
   b. False
   c. Can’t tell

B. Directions: Answers to these questions are not directly stated by the author. You will need to read between the lines to answer them.

1. Why would it be more difficult to measure with inches, compared with centimeters? __________________________________________________________

2. What is the reason for units of measurement to be divided up into smaller parts? __________________________________________________________________

C. Directions: The following questions ask about the assignments in the reading selection.

1. What do you suppose is the purpose for the questions in the section labeled Covering the Reading?

________________________________________________________________________

2. How would you use the ruler on page 102 to answer questions 13, 14, and 15?

________________________________________________________________________

3. Look at the questions in the section labeled Exploration. How would you answer those questions?

________________________________________________________________________
Foreign Language: French
Read pages 78–85 in your French textbook. Then look up at the clock and record
the time when you finished reading. Record this time in the space provided on
the response sheet. Close your book and answer the first question. Then open
your book and answer the remaining questions.

Finished reading time:______________________

STUDENT RESPONSE FORM

Part I. Directions: Close your book. Answer the following question on the back
of this sheet. What was this reading selection about? Use as much space on the
back of this sheet as you need to complete your answer.

Part II.

A. Directions: Open your book and answer the following questions:
   1. French teenagers have coffee at the end of meals.
      a. True
      b. False
      c. Can’t tell
   2. The French never really like to eat out very much.
      a. True
      b. False
      c. Can’t tell
   3. The best response to “You get an ‘A’ on a math test” is Très bien!
      a. True
      b. False
      c. Can’t tell
   4. Il est neuf is the proper way to say that it is nine o’clock.
      a. True
      b. False

B. Directions: Answers to these questions are not directly stated by the author.
   You will need to read between the lines to answer them.
   1. In what ways are Leçon B and Leçon C different?

   2. How would you answer the questions about money on page 82?

   3. What kinds of experiences have you had that are like those in Mise au point
      sur… la cuisine française?
3. Watch for students’ ability to integrate text information. Less proficient readers often ignore large chunks of important text information to the detriment of meaning. Proficient readers make strategic use of all of the text information they need to comprehend well and complete assignments successfully. Sometimes, proficient readers skip text information because they figure out that it is not necessary for completing an assignment.

Classroom Tests

Yet another approach to finding out about students is by observing their performance on well-designed classroom tests.

Well-Designed Classroom Tests. Rick Stiggins, a well-known assessment expert, defines sound classroom assessment this way (Stiggins, 2005):

- **Assessment targets are understandable and appropriate:** Goals, objectives, and outcomes are clear and appropriate.
- **Assessment methods are consistent with instruction and promote student learning:** Teaching, learning, and assessment tasks and procedures are complimentary; student performance with these assessment methods yields rich and significant information that helps teachers decide what to do next.
- **Evaluation and grading criteria are clear and consistent with targets and methods:** Evaluation and grading are connected directly to evidence of performance rather than being general impressions.
Communication about assessment is accurate and concerned with the interests of multiple audiences: Students, teachers, parents, and administrators all have a stake in sound classroom assessment.

Whenever teachers administer a test or otherwise engage in assessment, they learn more about students and about their own assessment practices. When students do not do well on a test or student performance is difficult to interpret, that is a sign that it is time for teachers to revisit assumptions about the assessment. Students’ test performance can also present numerous opportunities to learn more about students’ content understandings, literacies, and skills in a content area.

Gathering Information from Authentic Classroom Tests. Authentic tests are a particularly good example of a classroom test from which teachers can learn a great deal about students, particularly their content knowledge and related literacies. Authentic tests engage students in reading and writing in a content area for real purposes, typically consisting of tasks that resemble messy, real-world challenges and situations faced by adults. Response to an authentic test often requires a sophisticated understanding of knowledge in your content area and good measure of skill in reading, writing, and communicating. For this reason, authentic tests are good preparation not only for standardized and state tests but also for challenges later in life. An authentic test can be used before teaching students about a Big Idea. Administering a test beforehand can provide information about students’ prior knowledge. An authentic test can also be used after teaching, as an assessment of what students have learned and what they need to know more about. An example of an authentic test and an accompanying rubric used to evaluate students’ performance appears in Figure 6.9.

Steps in Preparing an Authentic Classroom Test. Preparing an authentic classroom test requires several steps:

First, it is a good idea to start with a clear goal or target for your assessment. Recall our discussion of Big Ideas. A Big Idea is an excellent candidate for designing an authentic assessment.
Second, consider a real-life example related to your target or goal. In the example provided in Figure 6.9, the target consists of assessing students’ understanding of physical conditioning related to vigorous physical activity. The real-life example is about getting ready for a physically demanding bike tour.

The third step consists of asking questions that will require students to use their knowledge about the Big Idea to answer questions about the real-life situation. Notice how, in our example, the required plan engages students in some very real writing—to prepare a plan that reflects principles of good conditioning.

The best authentic assessments are genuine, reflect the outside world, and immerse students in literate activity, such as reading, writing, and research.

**Interpreting an Authentic Assessment.** Designing an approach to scoring and interpreting for an authentic assessment involves some analysis of the question. First, identify the key elements of the question—What is the question asking for? In our example, there are four key elements:

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**Table: Scoring System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Element</th>
<th>Desired Performance</th>
<th>Scoring System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prepare a training plan</td>
<td>The plan demonstrates a reasonably safe development of conditioning from a beginning level.</td>
<td>No Evidence: 1 Some Evidence: 2 Substantial Evidence: 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific details</td>
<td>The plan contains details that will lead to levels of conditioning appropriate to the physical activity.</td>
<td>No Evidence: 1 Some Evidence: 2 Substantial Evidence: 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles of good condition</td>
<td>The plan connects details to clear and acceptable principles of physical conditioning.</td>
<td>No Evidence: 1 Some Evidence: 2 Substantial Evidence: 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan presentation</td>
<td>The presentation of the plan is clear and convincing.</td>
<td>No Evidence: 1 Some Evidence: 2 Substantial Evidence: 3, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---
preparing a training plan, providing specific details, connecting the plan to principles of good conditioning, and a clear and convincing presentation. Notice in Figure 6.9 how each of these key elements has been identified and connected to a five-point scale for analyzing students’ responses. Taken together, this approach to interpreting students’ performance is referred to as a **rubric**. Rubrics can be a great source of information about students’ content knowledge, their ways of knowing the content, and their literacy skills. Read How to Plan for more examples of designing and learning from authentic assessments.

**Portfolio Assessment**

**Portfolios** are a gathering of students’ work (Valencia, 1990). Often contained in a large, expandable file folder, a portfolio can hold the following:

- Samples of student work selected by the teacher and/or student
- Teacher observations, feedback, and notes
- Student’s self-evaluations
- Notes about a student’s progress, contributed by the teacher and the student

A primary goal of portfolios is to involve students in evaluating their own work. Portfolios also consist of a variety of indicators of learning so that teachers, administrators, students, and parents gain the most complete picture of a student’s development. Of all of the assessments described so far, portfolios represent perhaps the greatest variety of choices to represent a student’s personal identity, literacy skill, content knowledge and ways of knowing, communication and motivation, and knowledge and skill in content area literacy.

A distinguishing strength of portfolios, in comparison with other assessments discussed so far, consists of their potential for student involvement. Students can get involved in selecting their work and organizing and evaluating what they have accomplished. But teachers have to help students learn how to do these things. Teachers need to model each behavior—selecting, organizing, interpreting, and evaluating—so that students can learn to do these things on their own. There are many different ways to organize portfolios for different purposes. Here, we discuss three examples.

**Personality Profile Portfolio.** The simplest kind of portfolio—and a good place to start early in the academic year—is with a **personality profile portfolio**. A portfolio consisting of a personality profile asks
... for Authentic Assessment

Study the sample authentic assessments in the examples of scoring rubrics that follow. Design your own authentic classroom assessment and scoring rubric. Compare your assessment and scoring rubric with others in your class. What are some differences across content areas? What are some common elements? Describe what you will determine about students’ literacy and content area knowledge, using your authentic assessment.

Examples of Authentic Assessment

Mathematics Standard: solves real-world and mathematical problems involving estimates of measurements, including length, time, weight/mass, temperature, money, perimeter, area, and volume, and estimates the effects of measurement errors on calculations.

Getting Out of Credit Card Debt. Many financial experts are worried that the average American family now carries $8,000 dollars in credit card debt. With an average interest rate on credit cards at 13 percent, the experts are worried that bankruptcies may be on the rise as consumers fail to pay the balances on their credit cards. You are in a family with a monthly take-home income of $2,500. Your mortgage payment is $1,200 per month, your utility bills are $200, and you spend $400 on food and other household essentials. You have a $300 per month car payment. This leaves you with $400 per month. You have been using this cash and credit cards for clothing, entertainment (movies, CDs, etc.), travel, car repairs, home maintenance, and vacations. But now you want to pay off your credit card. Create a plan for paying off your credit card in the shortest period possible, taking into account all of your expenses.

English Standard: locates, gathers, analyzes, and evaluates written information for a variety of purposes, including research projects, real-world tasks, and self-improvement.

Documentary or Work of Fiction? Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth* won an Oscar for best documentary. Your job is to write a movie review for the local newspaper. Form an informed opinion of the film, considering accusations that the work is more a work of fiction than a documentary. Your review should show evidence that you have carefully considered your audience: students in your age group and older, parents, businesspeople, and senior citizens in your community.

Science Standard: understands the interconnectedness of the earth’s systems and quality of life.

Ratifying the Kyoto Treaty. The Kyoto Treaty commits industrialized nations to reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, principally carbon dioxide, over the next decade. Greenhouse gases are produced principally through manufacturing. However, there is a continuing debate among scientists about whether carbon dioxide levels are really increasing and the impact high CO2 emissions might have on the world’s environment. The
United States has chosen so far not to sign the Kyoto Treaty because of possible harmful effects of scaling back manufacturing on the economy and doubts about the real impact of greenhouse gases. You will write a report to Congress with your recommendations about greenhouse gases and the role of U.S. manufacturers.

Social Studies Standard: understands how social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors contribute to the dynamic nature of regions.

Tsunami Aid. The Asian tsunami of 2004 created unprecedented destruction of people and property in coastal areas of parts of Asia. You are part of a United Nations panel overseeing relief efforts in the region. Write a recommendation for the panel in which you describe: (1) the kinds of aid required to save people from further harm, (2) what needs to be done to rebuild in the region, including possible relocation of populated centers, and (3) early detection systems in case another tsunami occurs sometime in the future.

Music Standard: establishes a strategy for making informed, critical evaluations of the quality and/or the effectiveness of a performance.

The Grammy Awards. You are a member of the committee responsible for this year’s Grammy Award nominations. Using what you have learned about musical performance and quality, prepare a slate of three nominees each for the categories Song of the Year, Album of the Year, Best New Artist, and one other category of your choosing. You will defend your choices to a simulated group from the media (our class).

Foreign Language Standard: interacts in a variety of situations that reflect the activities of teenagers in the target culture, using appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication.

Living in France. You and a partner will construct a conversation about what it is like to live in your community in France. Your conversation must be in French. Include in your conversation your feelings about family, school, things that you do after school, and, of course, shopping, eating, and enjoying yourselves.

Visual Arts Standard: understands that works of art can communicate an idea and elicit a variety of responses through the use of selected media, techniques, and processes.

Select one of the visual arts we have been studying (painting, photography, collage, PhotoShop art, web page design). Next, consider a topic or idea about which you are passionate—the environment, politics, war, human rights, capital punishment, or gender in society, for instance. Communicate your idea in a way that will convince or persuade your audience (our class and parents on Parents’ Night) about your point of view. Your work needs to stand on its own with minimal, if any, additional explanation.

(continued)
### Examples of Scoring Rubrics for Authentic Classroom Assessments

#### Mathematics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The plan appropriately balances credit card payments with living expenses and pays off the credit card debt within a limited amount of time (within five years).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The plan appropriately balances credit card payments with living expenses and pays off credit card debt over an extended period of time (more than five years).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The plan mostly balances credit card payments and living expenses but could be more aggressive in paying down credit card debt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The plan does not lead to paying off the credit card debt and/or leads to increased debt or insufficient living expenses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>The plan contains insufficient details to determine its merits or potential in reducing the debt.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>A Little bit</th>
<th>Yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The piece is written in the form of a movie review.
- The review contains an informed opinion (evidence of outside research).
- The opinion is supported with details from the film and relevant research.
- The review considers the debate: documentary versus fiction.
- The review shows evidence of considering the community as audience.

#### Visual Arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceptional</th>
<th>Admirable</th>
<th>Acceptable</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>Topic or idea is portrayed with passion and energy.</td>
<td>Topic or idea is presented with enthusiasm.</td>
<td>Topic or idea is not very clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Art</td>
<td>The visual art is uniquely and ideally matched with the message.</td>
<td>The visual art is well matched to the message.</td>
<td>The visual art is related to the message, though other visual arts may have worked more effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasive/Artistic Technique</td>
<td>The artist’s technique powerfully persuades the audience.</td>
<td>The artist’s technique offers the opportunity for persuasion.</td>
<td>The artist’s technique is clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience Response</td>
<td>The audience is overwhelmingly moved by the visual art.</td>
<td>The audience is variously swayed by the visual art.</td>
<td>The audience can understand the purpose of the visual art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The audience is confused about the purpose of the artwork.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
students to represent something about which they are the world’s greatest experts—their personal identity (Wilhelm & Smith, 2002). To create a personality profile, students can use print media (magazines, books, and newspapers) and/or digital media (computers, scanners, word processors, and web publishing software) to represent their interests, favorite songs, important quotes, games, CDs, and movies. Students might want to include personal photos, provide links to favorite websites, or select and group web-based images of their favorite places. The products of this work can range from elaborately decorated folders to personal web pages and blogs. Figure 6.10 depicts an example of a portfolio entry in a personality profile portfolio.

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**The Best Time of My Life**

The best time of my life was when I visited my aunt and uncle in Florida. My aunt, Ellie, and uncle, Henry, are two of the most colorful people I have ever met. They took me to many of their favorite places and showed me a great time.

My uncle is a real estate developer who builds hurricane-proof houses. He took me on a tour of his building sites one time. The houses are built of cinder block, with walls about a foot and a half thick. He is obviously very proud of his work. At one site, he told me how he worked hard to keep the landscape as natural as possible. Almost to prove his point, he pointed to an orange tree full of oranges. He directed me to pull off my shirt and fill it up with oranges!

I did what he said and we had a feast on oranges for the rest of the day.

My aunt took me to Busch Gardens and spent the day with me. We walked around and saw all of the animals. When we were done, she took me out to Red Lobster. I never had scallops and shrimp that were so good!

Probably the best memory is the way my aunt and uncle treated me like one of their family. And although I was only 13, they treated me like an adult. They listened to me and took me seriously. I will never forget them.

**Summary Statement**

I chose this short essay to put in my portfolio because it tells a lot about me and my family. But it also shows how I can develop an idea in my writing, with an introduction, two main points and a conclusion. When I look back at the essay, it makes me remember my aunt and uncle and I feel proud that I am learning how to write better all of the time.

~Pete
Academic Portfolio. Academic portfolios are collections of students’ best work. Typically, academic portfolios consist of two parts: (1) classroom evidence, work samples, or test data that exemplify learning, and (2) summary statements that explain or help to synthesize the gathered work. Academic portfolios can be exhibits of students’ literacy skills and their content knowledge and ways of knowing in a content area. Students might also wish to display evidence of their motivation and skill in a content area through examples of their academic achievements.

Growth Portfolio. Growth portfolios are exhibits of students’ development from an earlier point to a later point. These portfolios are an important addition to any teacher’s system of ongoing assessment since so many other kinds of assessment, just sample a single point in time—a pretest or posttest, a writing assignment, or a class project. In contrast, growth assessments take samples from multiple points, documenting students’ growth in a particular area of content and skill.

For example, English teachers can help students to develop growth-oriented portfolios around persuasive writing. Mathematics teachers might focus on growth in problem-solving strategies. Foreign language teachers might emphasize growth in language use. Physical education teachers might organize portfolios according to progress with physical challenges and fitness knowledge.

Getting Started with Portfolios. There are a number of ways to make portfolios a regular part of classroom assessment. First, consider curriculum goals, especially standards-based Big Ideas, and students. Ideally, portfolios should reflect students’ development with respect to standards-based expectations and patterns of student performance appropriate for different age levels. Teachers can find clues to expected development for students within standards documents at the state, district, and school levels. Second, consider instruction—teaching and learning that are occurring to assist students in meeting the expectations. Instruction should be consistent with expectations, and assessment should be consistent with instruction.

Once teachers have identified Big Ideas and have selected and aligned instruction and assessment, it is time to organize and develop
students’ portfolios. To initiate portfolios, some teachers bring in their own examples—portfolios containing family pictures, professional portfolios, or covers of favorite books. Explain to students the significance of items in your own portfolio so that they get an idea of how portfolios uniquely portray things about individuals. In the beginning, students need lots of assistance in selecting examples and explaining their own selections. Continuous modeling of how to make choices and write explanations will help. Some teachers construct minilessons about how to make selections and the various reasons for selections. Easier reasons involve selecting the best work, as in an academic portfolio. Students can also choose something they have learned, something that took a long time, took a lot of effort, or involved interests outside of school. More sophisticated choices usually involve collaboration between teachers and students and focus on Big Ideas. These choices might focus on writing samples, results of content area tests, or student work samples, such as story maps, reader response, and class projects (Vizyak, 1999).

**Evaluating Portfolios.** A strength of portfolios concerns numerous opportunities to evaluate many different kinds of students’ work. Teachers can evaluate portfolios by designing a simple rubric, such as the one in Figure 6.11. This rubric was designed by using Utah’s core curriculum standards for health.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Evidence</th>
<th>Some Evidence</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comprehends concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows how to access valid health information and health-promoting products and services.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices both health-enhancing and risk-reducing behaviors.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzes the influences of society, culture, media, technology, and physical environment on health.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices and applies goal-setting, decision-making, problem-solving, and stress management skills to promote healthy behaviors.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops understanding and respect for self and others.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advocates for personal, family, and community health.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.11**
A rubric for evaluating a portfolio in a health class.
Students’ Self-Evaluations. Do not miss the opportunity to involve students in assessing their own portfolios. Students need help, however, in evaluating their choices and explanations. One way to help students evaluate portfolios is by introducing the idea of high-quality work. To evaluate portfolios effectively, students need to understand what it means to produce high-quality work in reading and writing performance and in response to classroom assignments and projects. Most students are accustomed to simply handing things in just to get a grade. To help students develop the idea of high-quality work, teachers ask students this question with every assignment:

If we do high-quality work on this assignment, what will it look like?

Teachers and students then discuss what it means to do the best work on an assignment, even participating in creating the evaluation criteria and the grading for the assignment. Figure 6.12 depicts additional questions that are useful in helping students to evaluate the contents of their portfolio.

Portfolios and Parent Conferences. It has become popular in recent years to engage students in using portfolios to evaluate their work during parent conferences. The teacher should model each of the steps that students will need to know to do this. First, students will need to be intimately involved in making and explaining their own portfolio choices. Next, they need to have practice in evaluating and reflecting on their own work. Finally, teachers should organize and guide practice sessions for students so that they can converse comfortably with parents about what they have learned. Read Chapter 12, “Building Community,” for more suggestions about communicating with parents about assessment information.

Figure 6.12 Questions to help students evaluate their own portfolios.

- What is your favorite piece (or the best piece) in your portfolio?
- Why is this piece your favorite (or the best)?
- Do you think your writing (or your reading, math, science, social studies, foreign language, physical education, or music) has improved? How?
- How can you improve your writing (or your reading, math, science, social studies, foreign language, physical education, or music)?
- How can teachers help you improve your writing (or your reading, math, science, social studies, foreign language, physical education, or music)?
Mandated Assessments

State Assessments
State-level assessments have been around for more than half a century but have acquired much more importance in the past few years. Many states are using and revising state assessments to meet the requirements of No Child Left Behind. With only a few exceptions, most state tests are not standardized. Validating a test to make it standardized is costly and labor intensive, so many states have ignored standardization (Popham, 2003). Because of this, comparisons of student performance on state tests from one year to another are normally not recommended.

No Child Left Behind requirements for students to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress have changed this picture. Some states are either replacing state tests with standardized tests, such as the Metropolitan or the ACT, or revising and reviewing existing state tests so that they become standardized. Some states are designing and implementing new tests called exit examinations to assess how well students are prepared for college and the workplace. Read the Research Brief for information on these new state testing initiatives. This section provides an in-depth picture of state tests and their implications for students and literacy.

Increased Challenges for Reading and Writing in Content Areas. As was discussed in Chapter 3, recent revisions to state content area tests have created increased challenges for reading and writing in content areas. Consider the examples of test items in Figure 6.13. Notice how each of the test items emphasizes not only subject matter knowledge but also the use of reading and writing to take a stand and defend it, analyze, make predictions and explanations using available information, and synthesize and interpret, combining readings and life experiences. When state tests were originally conceived, they were used to assess only the most basic skills, such as finding main ideas and simple computation (Conley, 2005). The newer tests represent higher standards and higher stakes for students, teachers, and schools. Not only are these tests often tied to graduation requirements, but schools that fail to demonstrate Adequate Yearly Progress are subject to No Child Left Behind penalties. Because of these policies, it is important for teachers to learn as much as they can about the state tests and the challenges these tests represent for students. Read the Action Research feature on page 189 to find out more about different kinds of content area tests and their demands for skill in reading and writing.
Problems with Interpreting State Tests. Some teachers are fortunate enough to receive results from the tests that pinpoint the areas of student’s strengths—taking a stand, interpretation, defending a point of view, for example—and areas of need: critical analysis, prediction, and explanation. However, results are sometimes presented in confusing ways, using terminology such as percent satisfactory, percent moderate, and
percent low and using unconventional scoring scales that are unlike any that teachers encounter in a classroom, such as a scaled score of 245, or 10 points above the state performance target. Again, the best way to understand students’ state test performance is to visit the state department of education’s website to learn more about the tests and their interpretation.

**State Assessments Tell Only a Partial Story.** Though state assessments are increasingly important with policies under No Child Left Behind, remember that the results tell only a partial story about students. If students believe that the tests have real consequences for them and they try hard, then test performance may say something about what they know or know how to do in a content area. Do your students perceive that the tests count? Do they believe that test performance will help or hinder their progress in school or later in life? Are the tests in any way

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**State High School Test in Social Studies**

You will now take a stand on the following public policy issue: **Should the U.S. Congress pass a law that requires political candidates to release a list of all organizations that contribute over $100?** You may either support or oppose a law requiring political candidates to release a list of these contributors. Write a letter to your congressional representative. You will be graded on the following criteria.

Your letter must include:

- a clear and supported statement of your position;
- supporting information using a Core Democratic Value of American constitutional democracy;
- supporting knowledge from history, geography, civics (other than the Core Democratic Values), or economics (it is not enough to state only your opinion);
- supporting information from the Data Section; and
- a credible argument someone with the opposite point of view could use and an explanation that reveals the flaw in his or her argument.

**Remember to:** Use complete sentences. Explain your reasons in detail.

   Explain how the Core Democratic Value you use connects to your position.

   Write or print neatly on the lines provided in your Answer Folder.

---

**State High School Test in Mathematics**

Gertrude is doing pushups as part of her exercise program. She did 2 the first day, 3 the second day, and 5 the third day. Each day she wants to do as many pushups as on the previous two days combined.

**Part A.** Based on the information above, how many pushups would she have to do on the sixth day? Extend the pattern through day six to support your answer.

**Part B.** Is it realistic for Gertrude to continue this program for pushups? Explain your answer. You may extend the pattern further to support your explanation.
State High School Test in Science

Provide three predictions for how the weather will change in Madison over the next several hours. Explain your predictions using what you know about the movement of air and moisture between high- and low-pressure systems.

High School Test in Reading

Write a two-page response to the scenario question that is stated in the box below. Your own ideas and experiences may be used in your response, but you MUST reference information and/or examples from ALL THREE reading selections to be considered for full credit (4 points). You may go back and reread or skim the selections at any time.

Scenario

On Halloween night, you plan to attend a school-sponsored party. Parents in the school district planned the party as a safe, alcohol-free alternative to unsupervised parties. A local band will be playing, and you expect to have a good time with your friends. One of your best friends invites you to go out drinking and spending the night terrorizing little trick-or-treaters and vandalizing houses.

Scenario Question

Even though you know it would be better to go to the school party, you really like your friend and enjoy hanging out. Should you go with your friend and try to keep things tame or convince your friend to go with you to the school party? Why?

relevant to how they see themselves now and where they see they are going? If the answer to these questions is no, then it might be unreasonable to expect students to perform very well. Their performance could have more to do with their apathy toward the tests than with their content knowledge or ways of knowing and communicating in a content area.

There are a number of relatively simple ways to determine students’ motivation and understandings about state assessments. One way is to work
with students on a few practice items. As students work on the items, ask them to describe how they are responding to the items. What knowledge are they using? What steps are they following to answer the questions? Watch for occasions when students get stuck—for items on which they are unable to analyze what the questions are asking, how and whether they are able to take a stand and defend it. Watch for signs that students are really engaging themselves rather than just plugging in answers.

**Standardized Tests**

Standardized tests in middle and high schools are often used to assess achievement with literacy and content area learning, to determine whether a student is experiencing problems with learning, or to assess a person’s potential for learning. Not all tests are standardized. To become
standardized, a test must be subjected to rigorous, long-term study. The performance of various subgroups of students is examined and compared over a period of time. Subgroups of students are usually identified by socioeconomic status; race or ethnicity; and urban, suburban, and rural locations. A goal of standardizing a test is to enable reasonable predictions about how individuals with certain characteristics tend to perform. This principle is central to the No Child Left Behind requirements that students from all subgroups need to demonstrate regular improvement (Conley, 2005).

Types of Standardized Tests. There are many different types of standardized tests. Achievement tests measure a student’s acquired knowledge and skills, such as literacy. Diagnostic tests are used to identify learning difficulties, particularly with reading and writing. Intelligence tests are used to indicate an individual’s potential for learning (McGraw-Hill, 2003).

Figure 6.14 depicts the names of many standardized tests that are used with adolescents, including the skill areas that these tests measure. As the figure illustrates, many standardized tests focus on foundational literacy and mathematics skills and, to some extent, on content knowledge, ways of knowing, and communicating in content areas.

Remember the standardized tests that you took for college entrance purposes? These include the ACT and SAT tests. The ACT test consists of multiple-choice items that cover four content areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science. An optional subtest consists of a writing task. The SAT tests include a reasoning test, consisting of verbal reasoning (literal comprehension, vocabulary knowledge, and extended reasoning) and mathematical reasoning (arithmetic, algebraic, and geometric); a writing test that assesses ability to express ideas in standard written English, recognize faults in language usage and sense changes in meaning; and an entire battery of subject area tests such as literature, U.S. and world history, biology, chemistry, physics, and foreign languages. Like IQ tests, only more specifically focused on performance in subject areas, these tests are designed to assess a student’s potential. These tests typically consist of heavy demands for skill in literacy along with requirements for content knowledge and content area literacy.

Reporting Student Performance. Student performance on standardized tests is reported in a number of ways (see Figure 6.15). Raw scores are almost never reported. The reason is that most standardized tests are concerned with representing an individual’s performance only in reference to the performance of individuals within a larger group. If a student receives a score of six correct items out of ten, it says nothing
about how the student performed with respect to the larger group. It is more likely that the score will be converted to a grade equivalent, a percentile, a stanine, or some other scale so that the student’s performance can be interpreted relative to the group’s performance. As a result, the student scoring a 6 might actually be performing on a par with other students in tenth grade (a grade equivalent), or in the fiftieth percentile (in the middle of all students taking the test), or in the eighth stanine (in the upper levels of achievement).

**Criticisms of Standardized Tests.** Although school districts use standardized tests for a variety of important purposes, the tests are not...
without their critics. Many educators rightfully point out that a score from a standardized test is only a snapshot of what students know or know “how to do.” Other critics point out that because standardized tests are developed on such a large scale, for entire regions or countries, they say little about students’ performance with respect to the local curriculum or locally required assessments (Kohn, 2000). Notice in Figure 6.1 on page 162 the areas that standardized tests do not test very well, including students’ personal identity and contextual sources of knowledge and communication, including families, peers, and the community. In many ways, students’ performance on standardized tests only poorly reflects the contexts in which students live and learn. Yet standardized tests, with their scientific aura, can have a powerful impact on students’ lives and the decisions that schools make.

It is important to remember that test performance, particularly on standardized tests, represents only one of life’s experiences and not a student’s entire identity (Gay, 2000). In fact, overreliance on standardized testing sometimes leads to bad decisions, such as placing students in educational programs that are poorly matched to students’ needs. Can you remember your own experiences with standardized tests as a student? Can you remember any ways in which standardized tests were
used to make decisions about your education or future? Looking back, were the decisions good ones?

**Using Standardized Test Scores.** School districts and schools use standardized tests for a variety of purposes, from gaining a big-picture perspective on how students are doing to making decisions about which courses will be available to students, such as honors and advanced placement classes. Schools and districts are interested in scores for answering questions such as: How are the tenth graders doing in reading and mathematics? and Are students getting better? For example, one school district recently reported that 50 percent of the eighth graders were reading below the fiftieth percentile, which translates into reading two or more years below grade level. Imagine a class in which half of the students were slow or poor readers. How would that influence your teaching? What modifications would need to be made for these students in instruction? In assessment?

Sometimes standardized tests are used to place students in remedial or lower-track classes. Other purposes include gathering data for important decisions such as identifying students who are in need of special educational services. For these purposes, teachers and consultants look for patterns in the test data, comparing a student’s potential with his or her actual performance, to determine, for instance, whether or not a student is performing up to his or her potential. If students are not performing as expected, then further study is usually undertaken, and special educational services might be provided.

Every teacher should find out what standardized tests are being used in a school and district and what data are available from the tests. Educate yourself about the purposes, the scoring, and the interpretations related to the tests. Get a copy of the tests, if possible, and explore the kinds of skills that are tested. Ask administrators, colleagues, and parents about the tests so that you understand how the tests are used to make decisions about your students. Be watchful for ways in which the tests and test performance are combined with other assessments—classroom assessments, observations, and conversations, for instance—in order for everyone to gain a complete picture of students’ performance. At times, teachers find themselves in the position of providing additional information that either supports or conflicts with the results of a standardized test. Become knowledgeable and proactive about standardized tests so that you can advocate effectively for the needs of your students.
Interpreting Assessment

One of the modern-day frustrations for many teachers concerns the need to take time to interpret assessment information. The view of this chapter has been that assessment should be occurring all the time—through less formal conversations, interviews and surveys, structured Content Area Reading Inventories and classroom tests, and student-centered portfolios. Teachers can also count on information from state assessments and standardized tests to regularly enter the mix. An important question is: How can teachers make sense of all of this information? One answer to this question is to look for patterns.

Personal Identity

Through conversations with students and observations, teachers might notice specific kinds of personal preferences for certain kinds of Big Ideas in the curriculum (such as “I like studying about different parts of the world. My mom is a travel agent.” or “I want to learn about the new word-processing program. My dad runs the computers at his work.”). In contrast, some students might voice an aversion to some subjects or ideas (such as “Algebra is hard!” or “I hate writing essays!”). Observing these patterns can help teachers to decide to investigate further, asking why students view some ideas as better than others. Or teachers can choose to use some students as resources for the class.

Literacy Skills

Assessment patterns can also say a great deal about students’ literacy skills. Teachers may observe some students who require more time to complete assessments or who make consistent kinds of errors while reading, writing, or performing. For instance, some students might experience difficulty with reading and writing because they have not yet mastered basic fluency skills necessary to put words together and understand them. These patterns can assist teachers with making special accommodations during instruction or...
assessment (see Teaching Today’s Learners on page 163) or referring students to special education teachers or literacy coaches for tutoring and extra help.

**Content Knowledge and Ways of Knowing**

Patterns in the data can also reveal a great deal about students’ content knowledge and ways of knowing. Remember that it is not the level of students’ knowledge that is most useful or revealing. Look for patterns that show which individuals know different kinds of information. Do not be fooled into thinking that entire classes of students have mastered the content if only a few students truly understand while others still suffer from misconceptions. Assessments of content knowledge can be a teacher’s most important resource with decisions about whether students finally “get it” or need reteaching.

**Communication Styles and Skills**

A fairly common and challenging pattern is for students to reveal their literacy and knowledge through oral communication yet fail to perform well on paper-and-pencil or computer-based tests. The reverse can also be true—some students are great on paper, yet falter when challenged to explain their thinking. With either of these patterns, teachers need to demonstrate the desired performances—reading, writing, and speaking—and provide students with guided practice and feedback. In this way and over time, teachers can help students to expand their abilities to communicate what they know.

**Context**

Assessment patterns related to school and community contexts concern connections. To what extent do students feel that their family experiences are important and valued? Do students have opportunities to participate using their knowledge about popular culture and the media? The more students feel connected, the more willing they are to participate and learn.

**Students’ Motivation, Knowledge, and Skill in Content Area Literacy**

This is where all of the patterns come together. What does the assessment information say about students’ motivation to learn? What does it
say about students’ capacity with the unique literacies required in each content area? How do their knowledge and literacy support their skill in content area learning? Of course, students will differ in ways in which the assessment information represents answers to these questions. Some students will struggle with motivation. Some will be unfamiliar with the language of a content area. Some will experience difficulties with comprehension and writing. Others will be unable to critically reflect on what they are learning. Each of these areas is covered in a separate chapter later in this book.

**Summary**

Although today’s assessment spotlight is mostly on state tests and standardized tests, it is important not to underestimate the role of informal conversations, observations and interviews, and classroom assessments in supporting teachers’ ongoing assessment. No single assessment can possibly deliver all of the kinds of assessment information that are important and useful. Teachers need good assessment information to see patterns in students’ performance and to make decisions about students’ literacy; content knowledge and ways of knowing; communication styles; and motivation, knowledge, and skill in content area literacy. Teachers need good assessment information to create contexts for students to become more literate, increasingly knowledgeable in a content area, and, ultimately, successful learners.

**Special Projects**

1. Prepare a set of interview questions or a survey that you would use with students in your class. If possible, try your interview or survey out on some students. What did you learn?

2. Design a reading attitude or a reading interest survey for your content area. Adapt the surveys depicted in this chapter to focus on reading attitudes and interests in your content area. If possible, administer the survey to a group of students. What patterns in reading attitudes and interests did you discover? How can you use this information in your teaching (for instance, selecting texts to use in your instruction)?
3. Using the guidelines in this chapter, create a Content Area Reading Inventory for a text or other kinds of reading material in your content area.

4. Describe your system of ongoing assessment, using the techniques described in this chapter and/or others that you know about or can find, for example, on the Internet. Remember to start with Big Ideas. Next, consider the kinds of instruction you will use to teach the Big Ideas. Describe assessments for (a) learning about students’ personal identities, (b) students’ knowledge about Big Ideas and ways of knowing, (c) students’ communication styles and skills, and (d) understanding students’ motivation, knowledge, and skill in content area literacy.

Praxis Practice

Working with Questions to Prepare for the Praxis Reading Across the Curriculum Test

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Which are some examples of assessments teachers can use to keep track of their students’ growth in literacy:
   a. attitude and interest surveys.
   b. classroom tests for content knowledge.
   c. classroom observations, Content Area Reading Inventory, classroom tests.
   d. motivation surveys, classroom tests and interest inventories.

2. Which is an example of good assessment practice in your classroom:
   a. Always review unit tests with students.
   b. Have students self-correct any assessments.
   c. Use only written tests.
   d. Test often using multiple kinds of assessments.
3. How often should you employ assessments in your classroom?
   a. At the beginning of a unit.
   b. At the end of a unit.
   c. All of the time.
   d. At the beginning and the end of a unit.

**Constructed Response Question**

1. Describe how you would go about designing a Content Area Reading Inventory to assess students’ reading for a particular topic in your content area.

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**Suggested Readings**


Go to Topic 2: Assessment in the MyEducationLab (www.myeducationlab.com) for your course, where you can:

- Find learning outcomes for Planning for Instruction along with the national standards that connect to these outcomes.
- Complete Assignments and Activities that can help you more deeply understand the chapter content.
- Apply and practice your understanding of the core teaching skills identified in the chapter with the Building Teaching Skills and Dispositions learning units.

Go to the Topic A+RISE in the MyEducationLab (www.myeducationlab.com) for your course. A+RISE® Standards2Strategy™ is an innovative and interactive online resource that offers new teachers in grades K-12 just in time, research-based instructional strategies that:

- Meet the linguistic needs of ELLs as they learn content
- Differentiate instruction for all grades and abilities
- Offer reading and writing techniques, cooperative learning, use of linguistic and nonlinguistic representations, scaffolding, teacher modeling, higher order thinking, and alternative classroom ELL assessment
- Provide support to help teachers be effective through the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing along with the content curriculum
- Improve student achievement
- Are aligned to Common Core Elementary Language Arts standards (for the literacy strategies) and to English language proficiency standards in WIDA, Texas, California, and Florida.