Performance Assessment Strategies: Project-Based Learning

In response to the growing demand for accountability in the classroom, educators must use multiple assessment measures to to gauge student performance accurately.. In addition to quizzes, tests, essay exams, and standardized tests, assessment incorporates a variety of performance-based measures, such as project-based learning.

Project-based learning enables students to apply and acquire knowledge and develop skills by investigating complex questions or challenges over an extended period of time. While completing individual projects, group projects, or a combination of both, students use their creativity and collaboration skills to communicate their ideas. These activities help students become aware of diverse audiences for their work.

Teachers may allow students to choose the type of project to complete so that the project is more meaningful to them. McGraw Hill offers a Hands-On Topic Project for every topic. Examples of these activities include creating a graphic novel, writing a magazine cover story, and writing and illustrating or finding images for a travel journal. In addition to these more traditional activities, projects may include creating online maps, podcasts, and virtual speaking avatars. Each project contains a peer or teacher rubric.

What Are Some Typical Performance-Based Assessments?

There are many kinds of performance-based assessments. They all challenge students to create products that demonstrate what they know and their ability to apply it.

Writing

Performance-based writing assessments challenge students apply their knowledge of social studies in a variety of contexts. Writing activities are most often completed by an individual rather than by a group.

Journals: Students write from the perspective of a historical character or a citizen of a particular historical era.

Letters: Students write a letter from one historical figure to another or from a historical figure to a family member or another audience.

Position Papers or Editorials: Students explain a controversial issue and present their own opinion and recommendations, supported with strong evidence and convincing reasons.

News articles: Students write a variety of stories from the perspective of a reporter living in a particular historical time period. This could also involve writing letters to the editor.

Biographies and Autobiographies: Students write about historical figures either from the third person point of view (biography) or the first person point of view (autobiography).

Creative Stories: Students integrate historical events into a piece of fiction, incorporating the customs, language, and geography of the period.

Poems and Songs: Students follow the conventions of a particular type of song or poem while writing about a historical event or person.

Research Reports: Students synthesize information from a variety of sources into a well-developed research report.

Oral Presentations

Oral presentations allow students to demonstrate their social studies literacy before an audience. Oral presentations are often group efforts, although they do not need to be.

Simulations: Students hold simulations or reenactments of actual events, such as trials, acts of civil disobedience, battles, speeches, and so forth.

Debates: Students debate opposing viewpoints of a historical policy or issue. Students can debate from a contemporary perspective or in a role in which they assume a viewpoint held by a historical character.

Interviews: Students conduct a mock interview of a historical character or bystander.

Oral Reports: Students present the results of research efforts in a lively oral report. This report may be accompanied by visuals.

Visual Presentations

Visual presentations allow students to demonstrate their conceptual understanding in a variety of visual formats. Visual presentations can be either group or individual projects.

Models: Students make models to demonstrate or represent a process, place, event, battle, artifact, or custom.

Museum Exhibit: Students create a rich display of material around a topic. Typical displays might include models, illustrations, photographs, videos, writings, and audiotaped explanations.

Graphs or Charts: Students analyze and represent historical data in a line graph, bar graph, table, or other chart formats.

Drawings: Students represent or interpret a historical event or period through illustration, including political cartoons.

Posters and Murals: Posters and murals may include maps, timelines, diagrams, illustrations, photographs, collages, and written explanations reflecting students' understanding of historical information.

Quilts: Students sew or draw a design for a patchwork quilt that shows a variety of perspectives, events, or issues related to a key topic.

Videos: Students film a video to show historical fiction or to record a historical reenactment.

Multimedia Presentations or Slide Shows: Students create a computer-generated multimedia presentation containing historical information and analysis.

How Are Performance Assessments Scored?

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Scoring Rubrics: A scoring rubric is a set of guidelines for assessing the quality of a process and/or product. It establishes criteria used to distinguish acceptable responses from unacceptable ones, generally along a scale from excellent to poor. Rubrics clearly outline expectations for behaviors and outcomes. Rubrics may be used as guidelines as the students prepare their products. They are also commonly used for self-assessment.

Models of Excellent Work: Teacher-selected models of excellent work concretely illustrate expectations and help students set goals for their own projects.

Student Self-Assessment: Students can assess themselves using a variety of methods. They can rank their work in relation to the model, use a scoring rubric, and write their own goals. Students can then evaluate how well they have met the goals they set for themselves. Regardless of which method or methods students use, they should be encouraged to evaluate their behaviors and processes, as well as the finished product.

Peer or Audience Assessment: Many performance tasks target an audience other than the classroom teacher. If possible, an audience of peers should give the student or group feedback. Have the class create rubrics for specific projects together.

Observation: As students carry out their performance tasks, you may want to formally observe them at work. Start by developing a checklist, identifying all the specific behaviors and understandings you expect students to demonstrate. Then observe students as they carry out performance tasks and check off the behaviors as you observe them.

Interviews: As a form of ongoing assessment, you may want to conduct interviews with students, asking them to analyze, explain, and assess their participation in performance tasks.

Incorporate project-based learning as a strategy for assessment. To learn more, explore our programs at:
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