

Traditional Assessment vs. Authentic Assessment

Traditional	Authentic
Selecting a Response	Performing a Task
Contrived	Real-life
Recall/Recognition	Construction/Application
Teacher-structured	Student-structured
Indirect Evidence	Direct Evidence

- In the TA model, the curriculum drives assessment. "The" body of knowledge is determined first. That knowledge becomes the curriculum that is delivered.
- In the AA model, assessment drives the curriculum. That is, teachers first determine the tasks that students will perform to demonstrate their mastery, and then a curriculum is developed that will enable students to perform those tasks well, which would include the acquisition of essential knowledge and skills. *This is "backwards design"*.
- **But a teacher does not have to choose between AA and TA. It is likely that some mix of the two will best meet your needs.**

Definitions:

Selecting a Response to Performing a Task: On traditional assessments, students are typically given several choices (e.g., a,b,c or d; true or false; which of these match with those) and asked to select the right answer. In contrast, authentic assessments ask students to demonstrate understanding by performing a more complex task usually representative of more meaningful application.

Contrived to Real-life: It is not very often in life outside of school that we are asked to select from four alternatives to indicate our proficiency at something. Tests offer these contrived means of assessment to increase the number of times you can be asked to demonstrate proficiency in a short period of time. More commonly in life, as in authentic assessments, we are asked to demonstrate proficiency by doing something.

Recall/Recognition of Knowledge to Construction/Application of Knowledge: Well-designed traditional assessments (i.e., tests and quizzes) can effectively determine whether or not students have acquired a body of knowledge. Thus, as mentioned above, tests can serve as a nice complement to authentic assessments in a teacher's assessment portfolio. Furthermore, we are often asked to recall or recognize facts and ideas and propositions in life, so tests are somewhat authentic in that sense. However, the demonstration of recall and recognition on tests is typically much less revealing about what we really know and can do than when we are asked to construct a product or performance out of facts, ideas and propositions. Authentic assessments often ask students to analyze, synthesize and apply what they have learned in a substantial manner, and students create new meaning in the process as well.

Teacher-structured to Student-structured: When completing a traditional assessment, what a student can and will demonstrate has been carefully structured by the person(s) who developed the test. A student's attention will understandably be focused on and limited to what is on the test. In contrast, authentic assessments allow more student choice and construction in determining what is presented as evidence of proficiency. Even when students cannot choose their own topics or formats, there are usually multiple acceptable routes towards constructing a product or performance. Obviously, assessments more carefully controlled by the teachers offer advantages and disadvantages. Similarly, more student-structured tasks have strengths and weaknesses that must be considered when choosing and designing an assessment.

Indirect Evidence to Direct Evidence: Even if a multiple-choice question asks a student to analyze or apply facts to a new situation rather than just recall the facts, and the student selects the correct answer, what do you now know about that student? Did that student get lucky and pick the right answer? What thinking led the student to pick that answer? We really do not know. At best, we can make some inferences about what that student might know and might be able to do with that knowledge. The evidence is very indirect, particularly for claims of meaningful application in complex, real-world situations. Authentic assessments, on the other hand, offer more direct evidence of application and construction of knowledge. As in the golf example above, putting a golf student on the golf course to play provides much more direct evidence of proficiency than giving the student a written test. Can a student effectively critique the arguments someone else has presented (an important skill often required in the real world)? Asking a student to write a critique should provide more direct evidence of that skill than asking the student a series of multiple-choice, analytical questions about a passage, although both assessments may be useful.

Taken from:

Jon Mueller's Authentic Assessment Toolbox

<http://jfmuller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/index.htm>