Performance-Based Learning and Assessment

What are some key attributes of performance-based approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment?

Performance-based approaches can be designed to incorporate real-world problems and tasks, giving students opportunities to develop and apply knowledge and skills in settings that resemble authentic, real-life situations. Such approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment can be used to promote students' deeper learning and higher-order thinking skills and have been shown to prepare students for college and the workplace.

What is performance-based assessment?

Performance-based assessment requires students to demonstrate or apply their knowledge, skills, and strategies by creating a response or product or doing a task.

Students' responses or performances are typically judged against standards or criteria in a checklist or rubric focusing on the stages of skill development and what a student can do.

How does performance-based assessment fit into an assessment strategy that includes multiple measures?
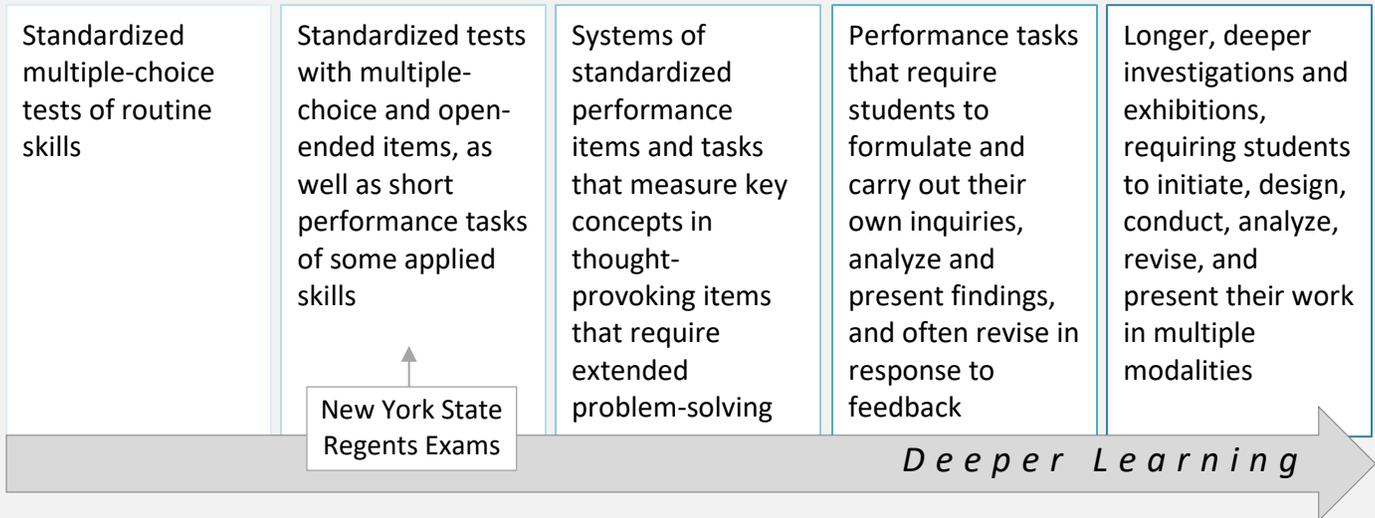
Within a system that includes multiple assessment measures, each type of assessment has a valuable role to play, and different types of assessments work together to provide a picture of students' mastery of learning standards. New York's strategy values each type of assessment, from the classroom to the state level, and how they can add evidence to answer questions about student learning. Local assessments should support instruction and enable appropriate supports and learning opportunities to be provided to students, while state assessments provide critical evidence of students' access to opportunities to learn across the state.

Because performance-based assessments require students to construct a response or perform an open-ended task, they are an important tool for measuring higher-order thinking and skills, such as the ability to apply knowledge and use reasoning to solve realistic problems, evaluate the reliability of sources of information, and synthesize and analyze information to draw conclusions.

Continuum of Assessments in a Multiple–Measures System

Depending on the purpose for which an assessment is being used, performance tasks can be part of standardized assessments—as shown toward the left/center of the continuum—or can be designed to incorporate a greater degree of student initiative and choice.

Standardized multiple-choice tests of routine skills	Standardized tests with multiple-choice and open-ended items, as well as short performance tasks of some applied skills	Systems of standardized performance items and tasks that measure key concepts in thought-provoking items that require extended problem-solving	Performance tasks that require students to formulate and carry out their own inquiries, analyze and present findings, and often revise in response to feedback	Longer, deeper investigations and exhibitions, requiring students to initiate, design, conduct, analyze, revise, and present their work in multiple modalities

New York State Regents Exams

Deeper Learning →

What are different ways in which performance–based learning opportunities and assessments can be designed and used?

Performance-based approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment vary widely. Depending on the learning objectives and the context, tasks may be designed to incorporate some of the following features:

- Capstone projects
- Community projects
- Competency-based approaches
- Group projects or performances
- Hands-on projects
- Independent work or research
- Internships, work-based learning, and career and technical education
- Learning in more than one domain—in other words, tasks are interdisciplinary or develop and measure both content knowledge and cross-cutting skills and competencies
- Multiple opportunities to receive feedback and revise or re-do
- Multiple types of performance, e.g., a written component plus an oral presentation, or a group component and an individual component
- Presentation before an evaluation panel and/or audience of community members
- Student choice, within established parameters
- Student self-reflection

There is no single "right" way to use PBLA.

Performance–based assessments can be:

Designed to evaluate the process used to solve a task	**AND**	Designed to evaluate the product
Embedded in the curriculum	**OR**	Part of a stand-alone assessment
Formative	**OR**	Summative
One-time demonstration of knowledge and skill	**OR**	Included in a portfolio
Single-classroom	**OR**	Common across multiple classrooms or schools
Evaluated by the classroom teacher	**OR**	Evaluated by one or more external evaluators

…depending on the purpose for which they are being used.

What are some examples of types of performance–based assessment tasks?

Performance-based assessments range from simple, "on-demand" tasks that can be completed in a brief amount of time, such as an in-class writing exercise or short-answer test; to longer and/or more complex tasks that can be completed in and/or outside of the classroom, such as:

- Analyzing and proposing solutions to real-world problems
- Analyzing literary or historical documents in an essay
- Building a prototype, device, or structure
- Conducting and analyzing a laboratory investigation
- Creating a work of art
- Demonstrating a technique (e.g., welding or pipetting)
- Designing and delivering a multi-media presentation
- Developing a computer program
- Game-play assessments in physical education
- Participating in a debate
- Performing in a theatrical, dance, or music production or video
- Researching a topic and writing a report

Sources: Baker, O'Neil & Linn 1993; Berman 2008; Best & Winslow 2015; Darling-Hammond 2017; Education Week 2019; Fine & Pryiomka 2020; Guha, Wagner, Darling-Hammond, Taylor & Curtis 2018; Herman, Gearheart & Aschbacher 1996; Hilliard 2015; Lund & Kirk 2019; Parke, Lane & Stone 2006; Michigan Assessment Consortium 2017; Standards for Educational & Psychological Testing (AERA, APA, & NCME 2014); Stanford SRN 2008