

Formative assessment in the arts: How to develop student assessment tasks, instruction, and essential questions (EQs)

First, take a quick look at two resources we recommend:

1. [Four Myths About Arts Education Assessment](#) from the *Arts Assessment Resource Guide*
2. Grant Wiggins' blog post "[Oh, You Can't Measure That](#)"

Now that you are warmed up...

1. First, start thinking through your assessment task:
 - Choose a learning goal (or more than one if desired).
 - What might students do to show they know and/or can do the goal?

Example from kindergarten...

If the learning goal is: Students will create a work of art inspired by the natural environment.

Then the assessment task might be: Teacher will gather samples of leaves from outdoors. Students will look closely at the leaves. Students use crayons to color their leaves. Students use watercolor paint to create a wash for the leaves. Teacher reviews finished works and assesses them for their accurate depiction of a leaf.

- Make sure whatever students are doing is **OBSERVABLE, MEASURABLE,** and **ALIGNED** (it assesses the learning goal you've chosen).
- Include how the teacher will record the results of the assessment.
 - In the example above, **Teacher uses a simple checklist to capture information about student work** meets this criterion.

2. Next, turn your attention to what instruction will look like:
 - What learning opportunities(s) might students engage in to learn what you're assessing? What will the teacher do to support students as they learn?

Example aligned to assessment above:

Students go outside and teacher leads discussions to point out colors, textures, and features of fall foliage. Students choose a leaf to take inside. Teacher leads a discussion using questioning techniques to look closely at the leaves and notice shape, color, and details. Teacher demonstrates techniques with paintbrushes for working with watercolor. Students practice the techniques. Teacher demonstrates color blending and using pressure to create a thick layer of wax with crayons. Teacher demonstrates creating a wash with watercolors. Students continue to practice with both crayons and watercolor paints.

3. Finally, craft the essential question(s):
 - After crafting the learning opportunities, choose a question that could be posed to students to get them thinking at the beginning of the lesson.
 - Use HOW or WHY questions whenever possible, although other question types can work, too. These questions should not have one right answer (or a finite list of right answers) but invite many different possible answers.

- ✓ Strong examples: How does balance in a composition affect a viewer's response? How can artists manipulate color to express ideas or feelings? Where do artists get their ideas?
- ✓ Poor examples: Why is it important to dab our paintbrush before dipping it into paint? What happens when you mix red and blue together?
- ✓ EQ aligned to example above: How can we represent nature in our artwork?

- Practices to avoid when designing essential questions:
 - Don't ask a question that has one answer.
 - Don't ask a question that can be answered with a finite list.