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# Essential Components of the Vermont Framework for Proficiency: Performance Assessments

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to explain why performance assessments that provide opportunities for learners to strengthen student agency and demonstrate the cognitive, personal, and interpersonal skills and knowledge needed to achieve college and career readiness are essential components within the Vermont Framework for Proficiency.

## What Is a Performance Assessment?

In the [Student-Centered Terminology](#) document, performance assessments are defined:

Performance assessments are any teacher or student-designed learning activity or investigation in which students demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and/or skills through a performance task. Performance assessments engage students in meaningful learning in authentic contexts, show genuine applications of knowledge, and yield a tangible product and/or performance that serves as evidence of learning.

The distinction between a performance assessment and a performance task is also explained.

A performance task is what students actually do within a larger performance assessment framework. Tasks [and assessments] built around student interests engage students and help them make connections to their personal lives.

[Jay McTighe](#) further clarifies that a performance task involves the application of specific knowledge or skills as part of a genuine performance within a context. He provides the example of dribbling a basketball as a demonstration of skill while dribbling within a game of basketball exemplifies a performance assessed within a complex authentic context.

## Why Bother?

In addition to assessing content-specific skills in a meaningful context, performance assessments also provide an opportunity to assess [transferable skills](#), those 21st-century skills that are essential for students to survive in a [globally and digitally connected world](#) that is constantly changing. Performance assessments allow for personalization within an assessment system, enabling students to bring their lived experiences and interests into the classroom through culturally relevant tasks.



One powerful means of bringing students' culture into the classroom is through culturally relevant performance assessments. Performance assessments center students' identity and experiences by asking them to show what they know and can do through multidisciplinary projects, presentations of their learning in front of a panel, and reflections on their educational trajectory. ([Keeping Students at the Center With Culturally Relevant Performance Assessments](#))

According to the [Vermont Personalized Learning Planning Process \(PLP\) Manual](#), “Research suggests that students will be more motivated to learn and be more successful at learning if they have ownership, or student agency, over their education and can inform what they learn, how they learn it, and how they show evidence of their learning” (p. 5). The expectation is for students to engage in deep learning and take an active role in the assessment process in order to move their learning forward and build long-term self-regulation skills (VT PLP Manual). Performance assessments can therefore serve to center students' identity and experiences by asking them to show what they know and can do through multidisciplinary projects, presentations of their learning, and reflections on their educational trajectory.

In the book, [Designing Authentic Performance Tasks and Projects](#), McTighe claims that “. . . a modern education extends beyond knowledge acquisition; it calls for students to be able to transfer their learning to real-world situations” (p. 16). Performance assessments enable students to demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and understandings they have mastered within a traditional classroom setting or a flexible pathway. McTighe describes the multiple benefits of performance assessments:

1. Set in authentic contexts, students are more likely to see the relevance of what they are learning;
2. Work toward authentic performance helps students to synthesize discrete knowledge and skills into a more coherent whole; and
3. Performance on tasks and projects by students provides the assessment evidence of their understanding and capacity to apply their learning (p. 16 – 17).

Performance assessments and tasks provide an ideal context for integrating academic content and transferable skills as well as supporting the development of the attributes described in [A Vermont Portrait of a Graduate](#): Learner Agency, Global Citizenship, Academic Proficiency, Well-Being, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, and Communication. Performance assessments create opportunities for students to transfer what they have learned across contexts and equip them with the knowledge and skills with which to do so. Additionally, the complexity of performance assessments provides each learner an entry point. Some may demonstrate proficiency upon completion of the task, while others will need additional opportunities and support to achieve proficiency.

A Learning Policy Institute Research Brief, [The Promise of Performance Assessments: Innovations in High School Learning and College Admission](#), asserts that a growing number of colleges are making standardized tests optional and seeking to recognize a wider range of student accomplishments. The authors contend, “By including performance assessment results in admission, placement, and advising decisions, colleges can create demand for improved learning and more authentic assessment in the K–12 system.” A focus, therefore, on transferable skills and deep learning in K-12 systems will better prepare students for meeting the demands of college as well as potential careers.

## **Final Thoughts**

[The Education Quality Standards](#) (EQS) state, “Students must be allowed to demonstrate proficiency by presenting multiple types of evidence, including but not limited to teacher-or student-designed assessments, portfolios, performances, exhibitions and projects” (EQS 2120.2. P.4). The inclusion of performance assessments within proficiency-based local assessment systems creates opportunities for learners to demonstrate their level of understanding, reveal areas of confusion, and connect discrete pieces of information. These assessments can also play a pivotal role in supporting flexible pathways to graduation by offering a more comprehensive and personalized approach to assessing students' skills, knowledge, and readiness for graduation. [Maya Kaul from the Learning Policy Institute](#) explains, “At their core, such assessments provide a critical space for students to reflect on and share their personal stories and their identities as learners.” Performance assessments can therefore empower students to respond from a cultural perspective that reflects their interests, connects past experiences to new learning, and fosters a sense of belonging.

## **Additional Resources**

[Defined Learning: Why Should We Use Performance Assessments \(Part 2\)](#)

[Getting Smart: Empowering our Students with 21st Century Skills Today](#)

[Strengthening Local Assessment Systems for Personalized, Proficiency-Based Education: Strategies and Tools for Professional Learning](#)