

Assessment Literacy Glossary

This list of terms relates to the Local Alternative Assessment work and is not intended to be an exhaustive list of assessment terms.

accountability systems—the mechanisms used (generally by states) to evaluate the performance of their education systems. In recent years, accountability systems have increasingly used the school as the unit for monitoring and intervention, based largely on the scores of each school’s students on a set of standardized tests.

accreditation—a process to evaluate the performance of public schools in accordance with Board of Education regulations.

alternative assessment—used to measure applied proficiency of knowledge and skills. In Virginia, alternative assessments include, but are not limited to, performance assessments. [See performance assessment]

assessment—any systematic basis for gathering data or information and making inferences about characteristics, proficiencies, or abilities of people, usually based on various sources of evidence; the global process of synthesizing information about individuals in order to understand and describe them better.

authentic assessment—a performance assessment that includes a context from the real world and/or a context that is authentic to the academic discipline.

balanced assessment system—the combination of assessments that form a comprehensive measure of student learning. In Virginia, a balanced assessment system should include a variety of assessment types that are matched to the content being assessed and the purpose of the assessment data, including the need to meet accountability measures. A balanced assessment system should allow opportunities to measure student achievement and growth based on content standards, specific learning goals, and the 5 C’s (critical thinking, creative thinking, collaboration, communication, and citizenship); the data gathered should provide meaningful information that supports and guides classroom instruction.

formative assessment—a process or assessment designed to intentionally collect information about the nature or degree of student learning during instruction, providing feedback to teachers and students and allowing for teachers and students to make instructional decisions (adjustments and modifications). Formative assessment is generally referred to as assessment “for” learning.

higher-order thinking skills—a category of thinking skills that requires students to go beyond recalling facts, understanding content, or replicating rote procedures; make connections; solve problems different from those given in classroom examples; and use content to reach and justify conclusions. Deep and rich use of higher-order thinking skills is often dependent upon lower-order thinking skills.

integrated performance assessment or interdisciplinary assessment—an assessment that measures student performance on content and/or skills across two or more subject areas.

inter-rater reliability—the degree of agreement among raters scoring a performance task, product, or assessment.

intra-rater reliability—the degree of consistency with which a single rater scores a set of students' work on performance tasks, products, or assessments.

local alternative assessment (LAA)—assessments created, administered, and scored at the local division level in the place of eliminated Standards of Learning tests, as required by legislation.

lower-order thinking skills—a category of thinking skills characterized by knowledge, understanding, and application of procedural skills.

performance assessment or performance-based assessment—generally requires students to perform a task or create a product and is scored using a rubric or set of criteria. In completing the task, students apply acquired knowledge and skills. This type of assessment often includes a written component. [See rubric]

performance task—a learning activity that requires students to perform a task or create a product to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and proficiency. Performance tasks occur during the learning process, provide feedback on learning to students and teachers during instruction, and offer opportunities for students to develop skills that may be applied in performance assessments.

portfolio assessment—a systematic collection of student work and artifacts that demonstrate growth and/or mastery of content, knowledge, and skills over an identified period of time.

project-based learning —a teaching method or approach that engages students in sustained, collaborative, real-world investigations. Projects are organized around a driving question, and students participate in a variety of hands-on tasks that seek to meaningfully address this question (Buck Institute). Performance assessment is typically a component of this approach to teaching and learning. [See performance assessment]

reliability—the consistency or stability of test performance. Tests must be constructed and administered so that measurement error from factors such as ambiguous scoring, unclear questions/directions, bias, cheating, or environmental factors is minimized.

rubric—a description of the criteria for success and levels of achievement for a task, product, or assessment. Rubrics are used to score various types of alternative assessments based on evidence in student work. When used during instruction, rubrics provide feedback to teachers and

students, allowing teachers and students to make adjustments and modifications during the learning process.

summative assessment—used to evaluate student learning, skill acquisition, and academic achievement at the conclusion of a unit, project, course, semester, program, or school year. Typically, summative assessments are comprehensive and representative of a set of knowledge and skills, and associated with high-stakes decisions (e.g., a grade in a course, promotion to another level, verification of a course credit). Summative assessment is frequently described as assessment “of” learning.

validity—the degree to which an assessment actually measures the learning it is intended to measure. In order to strengthen and account for the validity (and reliability) of an assessment, assessment designers use a combination of procedures and tools in the development of, the administration of, and the post-administration analysis of assessments.