



# Module 10

## Alternative Assessment

### Approaches to Language Teaching: Extension

**Video Length: Approximately 14 Minutes**  
**Notes to the Trainer**

For best results, have participants go through the readings for this module prior to viewing the video. As you work through this module, use pairs or groups whenever you think it might be effective. After each group activity, debrief the answers and use them for further discussion of various points. Refer back to the main points when appropriate. It is important that teachers apply the concepts in the module to their own classrooms and situations. The goal for this module is to build an understanding of some alternative forms of assessment, with an emphasis on formative assessment and on peer and self-assessment practices.

See Appendix A for additional handouts that can be used for general observation and discussion tasks with any of the modules.

#### **Before Viewing**

Ask participants to get into small groups and list all the different kinds of tests that they have given as teachers or taken as they learned English; for example, multiple choice grammar tests, true-false tests, etc.

#### **Debrief**

Once participants have created a list, have them do the following task and answer the following questions. Answers can be elicited in a whole class discussion or first determined in groups.

1. Compare lists; add on to your own list from others. After each type of test, write (a) the skill(s) that it was testing, and (b) whether it is testing knowledge of language or use of language.
2. Talk about which of the types of test on your list are best for a) measuring the proficiency of the skills they are testing, and b) achieving the purpose of the testing.
3. Check the tests on your list that you believe to be valid for their purpose and reliable. (For definitions of terms, see the preview vocabulary.)

If the above activity results in lists of fairly traditional tests for testing students' *knowledge* of the language, have the participants consider the following question. If *language proficiency* is defined as learners' ability to *use* the language, how could they show that they are able to do so? Have the participants work in groups and try to brainstorm ways that they might assess their students' language proficiency. (You may also find it helpful to first agree on a definition for "proficiency.")



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### Extension Ideas

Adapted from the Web site *Eduplace, FakeOut!* game <<http://www.eduplace.com/fakeout/>>. Place participants in groups. Individuals in the group get one or two of the words below (they are real but unusual English words that the average person is unlikely to know). You can substitute alternative words, as needed. Have participants individually write “fake” definitions for these mystery words.

alopecia	keratitis	telpher
piezometer	virago	kermis
postulant	kerseymere	sporran

Participants within each group then compare definitions and decide which one(s) they think are “best.” Have them then explain what criteria they used to define “best,” and how they “evaluated” (assessed) each other’s definitions. What form(s) of assessment seemed to best fit this task?

### Preview Vocabulary

Terms	Definitions
Assessment:	
• Formative assessment	A relatively informal assessment that takes place during the process of learning, as opposed to at the end. The purpose is to provide feedback, which helps the learning process.
• Peer assessment	Learners evaluate each other’s work, using pre-set guidelines.
• Performance assessment	Assessment of performance on an oral or written task.
• Self-assessment	A reflective process in which learners evaluate their own work based on pre-set criteria.
• Summative assessment	Formal testing or evaluation at the end of a learning period to measure what a student has learned.
Conferences; interviews	One-on-one sessions between the learner and the instructor. Learners assess their own standing in the class, using previously set criteria, and determine goals and expectations together with the instructor.
Criteria; guidelines	Standards set in advance and shared with the learner that establish how a performance will be evaluated.
Journals	Daily or weekly writing entries by learners in which they reflect on their own learning experiences and progress.
Language proficiency	A learner’s overall competence in a language.
Learning logs	A written account in which learners keep track of their own English use, activities, and progress through the term.
Portfolio	A systematic collection of a learner’s work over a period of time. It demonstrates learner progress and is evaluated according to pre-set criteria.

Now start the video. Listen to the introduction. Complete the guided observation and reflection tasks for each of the video segments. The next part of the manual is for trainees and is available on separate pages for ease of copying.

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## Module 10, Alternative Assessment

### Introduction, Expanded Narrative

Alternative assessment is a type of evaluation that directly evaluates learners' language skills. Paper-and-pencil tests show a learner's knowledge about the language. Different types of alternative assessment show a learner's ability to use the language. They also give learners a role in their own evaluation process.

Here are some reasons for using some kind of alternative assessment:

- Learners make real use of the target language – in this case, English – for an actual purpose. The language is a means of communication.
- Learners demonstrate what they have actually learned and how well they can use what they have learned. Criteria or guidelines based on the goals of the class are set up in advance so both teachers and students know what needs to be done to successfully complete the class.
- Learners get involved in their own evaluation. Understanding how to evaluate themselves enables learners to take responsibility for and self-direct some of their own learning.
- Learners' motivation to learn and use the language may be increased.
- It gives learners the chance to directly display their progress to family members and others in their school and community.

### Module Focus

The term "alternative assessment" refers to a variety of different types of evaluation procedures; for example:

- Self-assessment; self record-keeping
- Peer feedback and assessment
- Portfolios
- Performance assessment
- Observations
- Conferences/ interviews
- Learning logs
- Journals

During the introduction to this module, you saw two examples of conferencing (teachers working with individual students, and small groups of students during the class period). One teacher asked a young student about a chart and wrote her answer in her student progress book. The focus in the rest of Module 10 is on the first column above, self record-keeping, peer feedback, portfolios, and performance assessment.

Notice as you watch the module that almost anything you use for a task in class can also be used for assessment. In fact, using tasks for assessment is a direct way of testing whether students have learned how to accomplish the task. In order to use tasks for testing, you need to add appropriate assessment criteria.

### Video Segments #1 and 2, Self-Record-keeping, and Peer Feedback and Assessment [Read before viewing.]

One form of alternative assessment is to have students keep track of their own work. Another form

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is to have learners look at and correct each other's work. In these two segments, look for:

1. Records of their own work that students keep, and the means by which they keep the records.
2. An example of assignment criteria/ guidelines.
3. How the class was organized.
4. Types of materials/ skills students were using and working on.
5. The teacher's behavior, the students' behavior, and the interaction between them.

### Reflection

**[Read and answer after viewing.]**

1. What is the instrument students use for self-recording? What are they recording? Can you think of other things that students might keep track of through self-recording?
2. What example of assignment guidelines did you see? For what kind of assignment were the criteria written? Think of a typical task in your own classroom. Try to list the criteria you might give the students to help them complete the task successfully.
3. How was the class in Video segment #2 organized? Why do you think it was organized this way? What can peers offer each other in this situation?
4. What language skill were the students focusing on? What skills were they using as they worked together? Is this a form of assessment? If so, what kind of assessment was it, formative or summative?
5. What was the teacher's job, or role, during this activity? What was the students' responsibility?

### Video Segment #3, Portfolios

A portfolio is a collection of student work over a period of time. Students receive criteria or guidelines for creating and maintaining a good portfolio at the beginning of the process. It is these criteria that make the collection a portfolio. Here are some reasons for using a portfolio:

- Learners keep all their work in one place, which enables them and their teachers to keep track of their progress and see what they are doing well and where they need more work. Learners' ability to actually use the language, as demonstrated by work in the portfolio, can be evaluated by both teachers and students themselves.
- Students have the responsibility of keeping track of their own work and reflecting on their learning and progress.
- Interested people, like parents, principals, and directors, can see students' work and note their progress.
- Portfolios can be used in classes at any age or proficiency level.

In the video you see some of the physical considerations related to using portfolios in the classroom. Notice the form of the portfolios, where they are kept, and who accesses them for use.

### Reflection

**[Read and answer after viewing.]**

1. In what form are the portfolios kept and what age level uses each form? Where are they kept? Do you think students take them home? What might be some physical considerations related to using portfolios in your classroom?
2. What do you think might be kept in a portfolio at the two age levels represented in the video? In your own class? Make lists.
3. Working in a small group, make a list of criteria or guidelines you might use for evaluating portfolios in your class. Keep your list of contents and the goals for your class in mind.

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## **Video Segment #4, Performance Assessment** **[Read before viewing.]**

To assess performance, two things are needed: a task to perform and the criteria for a successful performance. During the performance, the teacher and student audience evaluate the performance using the established criteria. After the performance, they give constructive feedback to the performers. As you watch this video segment:

1. List the two types of performance you see and the language skills that are used in each.
2. Try to discover the purpose for each performance.
3. Decide whether you think the performance was well done or not.

## **Reflection** **[Read and answer after viewing.]**

1. Compare your lists with a partner or others in a small group.
2. In your group, speculate about the purpose for each of the tasks. What do you think the objective of the task was? What would be the objective of these activities in your own class?

## **Now You Try It—An Action Plan**

### **Step 1**

You can read some of the articles on the topic of alternative assessment (see Module 10 Readings plus the List of Additional Readings and Resources below). Using the video, you have seen a few examples and ideas from other teachers' classes. There are certain characteristics that define alternative assessment:

- Like all assessment, it begins with course objectives.
- It has a set of criteria that describe successful achievement that is given to learners in advance.
- It evaluates actual student performance.
- The student is part of the evaluation process.

Now, think about your own classes. How could you use one of the forms of alternative assessment in your class? Choose a language learning objective or goal from one of your courses.

### **Step 2**

Do one of the following.

- A) Short term. Design a portion of a lesson that includes a task or activity to help meet that objective. Use an alternative form of assessment to measure the learning results.
- B) Long term. Design a means for evaluating whether that one objective has been met over a longer period of time (multiple class sessions). Use an alternative form of assessment.

In both cases, you will need a set of criteria to determine whether the objective has been achieved.

### **Step 3**

Share your plan with others in your group. Explain the criteria and how you will use them in the assessment. Get ideas and feedback.

### **Step 4**

Change your design, as needed. Try it with your class. If you are not teaching, ask the trainer or another experienced teacher for feedback.

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## Answer Key to Module 10, Learner Feedback

Here are some suggested directions for answers to the questions for this module. Actual answers may vary depending on local context and the kinds of experience that viewers bring to the task of interpreting and applying video and text concepts.

### **Module 10, Video Segments #1 and #2: Self-Recordkeeping, and Peer Feedback and Assessment**

1. We saw classroom examples where students keep track of their completed reading and homework assignments on charts that the teacher has posted on the wall. There were also procedures or guidelines for reading assignments. These charts and procedures need not be expensive items. Teachers or students can make them with new or even recycled materials (e.g., cardboard, posterboard, or paper).

2. In video segment #2, students were grouped into pairs to work on a writing assignment for their portfolios. Students in pairs can help each other understand the assignment, can share ideas for content and organization, and can read each other's work, giving feedback on the ideas, structure, and clarity of the writing. This is a form of peer feedback, or one kind of formative evaluation. For pairs to be effective, they must have clear guidelines from the teacher, so they know what to look for as they read.

3. The teacher worked with individual pairs of students who needed help with the assignment. Usually, some pairs will require more help than others. It is the students' responsibility to stay on task, complete the task within the time allotted, and take their role of peer evaluator seriously, helping their partners as much as they can and listening to their partner's ideas.

Refer to the *List of Additional Readings and Resources* for this module for free online resources for rubrics and guides for this and other forms of alternative assessment.

### **Module 10, Video Segment #3, Portfolios**

1. In the younger class, students collected their portfolios in large plastic envelopes that were kept in bins. The high schools students' portfolios were large binders that were kept on shelves in the classroom. Students picked up their binders when they came into the class, so they could work on them during the class period. Although students may have taken some assignments home, the portfolio itself was probably kept in the classroom, partly because of its size and partly so that all the work would remain organized and in one place.

2. Younger students might keep drawings, art work, spelling tests, reading assignments, and short writing tasks in their portfolios. Older students might keep such things as tests, reading comprehension activities, worksheets, different drafts of essays, and reflections on their own learning in their portfolios. Students and the teacher together usually decide what is going to be kept in the portfolio for end of term evaluation. They also decide what the criteria for that evaluation will be.

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## Module 10, Video Segment #4, Performance Assessment

1. In the first performance, students are reporting the results of group work on a given academic topic. One student from each group gives the report based on their group's research and discussion. Skills used are reading, organizing ideas, speaking (both in group discussion and for the report), and writing on the overhead.

2. The second presentation is a group reading and dramatization of King Lear. Students are using an abridged form of the play. Skills used are listening (to hear the play read correctly), reading for comprehension, reading fluency, pronunciation, and the ability to read dramatically.

3. There are many possible purposes for each of the performances, including linguistic, academic, and affective purposes:

- To practice pronunciation.
- To work on oral fluency.
- To develop study skills.
- To learn how to give oral reports.
- To develop the language needed to discuss a particular topic.
- To use particular rhetorical organizations; e.g., compare / contrast.
- To learn more about the target culture and literature.
- To build confidence.
- To inspire creativity and analytical thinking.

The criteria for successful completion of the activity might focus on just one of these purposes or might include several. The teacher might decide on the criteria, or the teacher might negotiate the criteria with the students. Your purpose and criteria will depend on the assigned activity and the goals of your own class.