

# Assessment Strategies

“People still think that assessment is what you do after teaching and learning are over as opposed to thinking of assessment as giving feedback to help you to achieve your goal.” —Grant Wiggins, Educational Consultant

This video introduces assessment strategies aligned with the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages, state and district standards, and curriculum and instructional practices. Three case studies with comments from teachers, students, and experts in the field illustrate how several teachers are assessing their students’ foreign language skills.

The first case study examines an Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) in a French IV class in Springfield, Massachusetts. In the second case study, Spanish IV and French IV students in Nanuet, New York, present a performance task. Finally, in Pleasant Hill, California, a teacher uses backward design to plan a lesson and assessment for eighth-grade French students.

Use “Assessment Strategies”

- to learn about or refresh your understanding of different assessment strategies,
- as the focus of a professional development workshop, or
- to launch a discussion about assessing language learning.

## **Key Terms**

- formal assessment
- informal assessment
- negotiation of meaning
- performance assessment
- spiraling
- story map

# Assessment Profiles

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## **Integrated Performance Assessment**

Nancy Gadbois  
French IV, Grades 10–12  
High School of Science and Technology  
Springfield, Massachusetts

The Springfield School District participated in the ACTFL Performance Assessment Project, which used the ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (see Resources) to help measure student performance. The project focused on creating authentic, content-rich assessments that integrate the three communicative modes. Nancy Gadbois began doing Integrated Performance Assessments (IPAs) as part of this pilot project. Currently, teacher use of IPAs in Springfield is voluntary, and district-wide assessments do not include performance tasks.

In this case study, Ms. Gadbois’s students complete two portions of an IPA focused on a French music video. For the first task, students interpret the song’s meaning by observing visual cues in the video and by reading the lyrics. After receiving feedback on their interpretations, students complete an interpersonal communication task by discussing in pairs topics inspired by the music video. Ms. Gadbois later concludes assessing the students’ communication skills by having them share what they learned with a French-speaking audience—a presentational communication task.

## **Spanish and French Performance Assessments**

Wendie Santiago/Maureen Pizzutello  
Spanish IV/French IV, Grades 11–12  
Nanuet High School  
Nanuet, New York

Authentic assessments are a district-wide initiative in Nanuet, New York, driven in part by the New York State Board of Regents mandated tests (see Resources). The Regents tests encourage authentic assessments and performance tasks in foreign language education. Nanuet has a spiraling language program, which cycles content at increasingly complex levels from grades 7 through 12. Thus, while the culminating activities used by Ms. Santiago and Ms. Pizzutello were designed to meet the needs of their

# Assessment Profiles, cont'd.

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classes, both teachers used standard, departmental rubrics to assess students' performances.

In this case study, students write and illustrate a children's story, then record it on audiotape and perform it for younger students. This culminating activity measures students' achievement in the level IV class as well as their cumulative language learning in the Nanuet program. The students use rubrics for the written, artistic, and oral components of the project to help them draft their text and rehearse their presentations. The rubrics also serve as the teachers' assessment tool. Using the same rubric for both purposes ensures that students meet their teacher's expectations.

## Backward Design

Paris Granville  
French, Grade 8  
Pleasant Hill Middle School  
Pleasant Hill, California

Foreign language classes are an elective at the middle-school level in California, so there is no standard assessment required by the state or district. Paris Granville uses the backward design process to create her own multiple assessment methods. For each unit, she begins with the relevant district curriculum objectives, determines her outcome goals, and then designs the students' final performance or product and how it will be assessed. She then works backward to plan the individual lessons and make connections to the local and national standards. This process ensures that the lesson objectives mirror the assessment, and that individual activities lead to the intended outcomes.

In this case study, Ms. Granville assesses students individually on their interpersonal communication skills using a task that mirrors a previous class activity. She first reads to a group of three students a story similar to one they had read in class, then discusses it with one of the students. During the discussion, Ms. Granville negotiates meaning with the student as the student creates a story map with the information. After the exchange, Ms. Granville uses a rubric to provide the student with immediate feedback. (For more information on Ms. Granville's class, see "A Cajun Folktale and Zydeco.")

# Analyze the Video

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As you reflect on these questions, write down your responses or discuss them as a group.

## **Before You Watch**

Use the following questions to discuss or reflect on your current assessment practices.

- How do you presently assess students' skills in these areas: interpersonal communication, interpretive communication, presentational communication, and cultural knowledge?
- What guidelines does your school or district provide for assessing students in foreign languages?
- How do you design assessments so that you are testing what you've taught?

## **Watch the Video**

Watch this video in its entirety, or pause for discussion or reflection after each case study. Take notes on each teacher's assessment strategies, particularly how she provides students with feedback and what her assessments reveal about student performance.

## **Reflect on the Video**

Review your notes, and then respond to the following questions:

- What kinds of information do these case studies give regarding student performance? Regarding instructional strategies?
- How would you describe the role of rubrics and feedback in the featured assessment strategies?
- In the first and second case studies, what is the impact of assessing over a period of several days or weeks rather than over a single class period?

# Analyze the Video, cont'd.

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## Look Closer

If time allows, take a closer look at the individual case studies. Use the video images below to locate where to begin viewing.



### **Case Study: Integrated Performance Assessment**

You'll find this segment approximately 5 minutes and 30 seconds after the video starts. Watch for about 22 minutes.

Respond to the following questions:

- How does the initial interpretive communication task lead students beyond basic comprehension?
- Following their interpretation of the music video, what kinds of feedback do students receive and what are their reactions?
- How is the student-to-student interpersonal communication task enriched by the preceding interpretive communication task?
- During their discussion, what evidence is there that the students are using language in new ways? That they are negotiating meaning?
- How does the presentational communication task that students do next draw on the two previous tasks?
- How are rubrics used in the various phases of the IPA?

# Analyze the Video, cont'd.

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## **Case Study: Spanish and French Performance Assessments**

You'll find this segment approximately 28 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 15 minutes and 30 seconds.

Respond to the following questions:

- While all three communicative modes are visible in this strategy, the main focus is on a presentational task, both written and oral. How does the children's story project illustrate key characteristics of presentational communication?
- How do the teachers' rubrics address individual student strengths?
- What evidence do you see that students are engaged in this assessment?
- How do the teachers work together on this unified assessment? What are the advantages of this kind of collaborative effort?

# Analyze the Video, cont'd.

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## **Case Study: Backward Design**

You'll find this segment approximately 46 minutes after the video starts. Watch for about 7 minutes and 30 seconds.

Respond to the following questions:

- How does Ms. Granville use backward design to create authentic classroom assessments?
- How does Ms. Granville assess interpretive communication?
- How does Ms. Granville assess interpersonal communication?
- How does Ms. Granville use feedback to both inform students about their performance and shape her future instruction?
- How do Ms. Granville's classroom assessment techniques illustrate the adage "test the way you teach"?

# Analyze the Video, cont'd.

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## Put It Into Practice

Try these ideas in your classroom.

- If you are new to performance assessment, begin by incorporating smaller, informal assessments into your lessons. For example, turn a classroom activity into an individual task, as Ms. Granville did with the Cajun folktale. Or, if you used a story map to guide students through a class reading, your assessment can include an opportunity for students to map a new story that they have read independently. This approach allows you to examine students' reading strategies as well as their language abilities. If you are focusing on a commonly taught topic such as weather, include in your lesson an interpretive/interpersonal communication task in which students research the weather in different locations, discuss their findings in a group, then decide where they will travel. The assessment can mirror the learning activity, perhaps with new locations, and can be used to gauge vocabulary acquisition, research skills, and exchange of ideas.
- Use a compelling topic from your curriculum to build an assessment using the IPA model. Begin with a motivating and engaging video, musical recording, or written text as the prompt for an interpretive communication task. Next, create an interpersonal communication activity that allows students to incorporate content from the interpretive task that they found engaging. The final presentational task, which can be done in pairs or groups, allows students to develop a performance or product that demonstrates, both to themselves and to you, their ability in the language and their knowledge of the culture or content. If possible, try to spread the integrated assessments over several weeks, so that students can better absorb the feedback from one phase and use it productively later on. The ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners (see Resources) can help in the design of rubrics that communicate clear expectations to students.

# Resources

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## **General Assessment Resources**

ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners  
<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-performance-descriptors-language-learners>

Wiggins, Grant, and Jay McTighe. *Understanding by Design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998.

## **Case Study: Integrated Performance Assessment**

“À Nos Actes Manqués” a/c: Jean-Jacques Goldman, pub: JRG Editions Musicales, Music Video: dir: Bernard Schmitt, SONY Music Entertainment (France). Words and music from the album Fredericks Goldman Jones (1991).

American Association of Teachers of French  
<http://www.frenchteachers.org/>  
Note: This site has Carole Frederick’s music videos and accompanying teacher’s manual available for purchase.

IPA Interpretive Task Worksheet\*

IPA Project Description\*

IPA Student Feedback Sheet\*

Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks  
<http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/>

## **Case Study: Spanish and French Performance Assessments**

Nanuet School District: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment  
<http://nanunet.lhric.org/nandisc1rr.htm>

New York State Regents Examinations  
<http://www.nysedregents.org/>

Portfolio Project Description: Spanish\*

# Resources, cont'd.

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## **Case Study: Backward Design**

California Department of Education Foreign Language Curriculum Frameworks

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/cfir/fl/>

Rubric for Interpersonal Task\*

\* These materials can be found in the Appendix

# Notes

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