

Excerpts from:

Assessed Curriculum in the Middle Years and Diploma Programmes

This guide was developed in support of the project “Expanding Access, Participation and Success in the IB”

2. Principles of IB Assessment

2.1 Who assesses our students?

The IB’s assessment philosophy is founded on the belief that teachers are best-placed to assess their students. Teachers play an essential role in student learning and, therefore, in assessment. The IB also understands that teachers need support and guidance in understanding its assessment processes. For this reason the IB’s model of assessment relies on teachers making professional judgments about their students’ learning to:

- ☐ identify where students have understood, developed skills and added to their knowledge
- ☐ identify misconceptions or confusions which can then be corrected through further learning experiences
- ☐ reflect on their teaching strategies so that they can be modified if necessary
- ☐ determine the efficacy of learning experiences so that they might be adapted if appropriate.

The focus of assessment, then, is on **student learning** and the steps teachers must take to support it.

2.2 Assessment standards

The MYP model of assessment relies on teachers assessing student performance against a pre-determined set of assessment criteria. These criteria differ from subject to subject, reflecting subject methodologies and the emphases each subject places on the different aspects of learning. The criteria can be considered as the assessment **standards** and teachers are required to relate student work to those standards. Student achievement is measured by the degree to which the student has met the standard described in the criterion.

The IB model is best described as **criterion-related**. In the MYP and DP, teachers **do not** compare one student’s work with another to determine a “grade”. The criterion-related model does not pre-determine the number of students reaching a particular level of learning. It is possible, for example, that all students in a class could reach the very highest levels of learning.

2.3 The MYP model of assessment

The internal assessment model, as described above, applies to the Middle Years Programme. In this programme, teachers are required to assess their students’ work, using the criterion-related approach. To ensure equality of opportunity, teachers of a subject in the same school are required to standardize their application of the assessment criteria. The process of internal standardization requires teachers of that subject to come to a common understanding and application of the criteria.

However, the model is not 100% “internal”, as the programme has “external” processes to ensure a common, agreed standard.

2.5 Purposes of assessment

Whatever the programme, the IB reminds teachers that the main purpose of assessment is to **support and encourage student learning**. While determining student **grades** will be an important part of the processes of assessment, it must be understood that this is not its primary purpose. This view of assessment, which affects how the model works in practice, has implications for all stakeholders. Many teachers and administrators will have been through an educational system that is very different from the one described above; most parents will also have also been through those systems. Any deviation from what might be considered the „norm“ will need to be explained carefully – IB World Schools have a duty to educate parents about its assessment models and ensure transparency and openness in the processes of assessment.

3. Effective Assessment Practice

3.1 Be dynamic!

MYP teachers will need to view assessment as part of dynamic model of curriculum whereby planning and writing units, designing assessments and creating learning experiences are part of an integrative process.

Both the MYP and DP see the curriculum as a dynamic and interrelated 3-part cyclical process. These three parts will be influenced by:

- any state, district or local teaching requirements – the content
- the specifics of the MYP objectives, as detailed in the corresponding MYP assessment criteria descriptors
- the MYP subject requirements, which take into account the methodologies of the disciplines
- to some extent, the DP subject requirements – especially in the later years of the MYP.

3.4 Guide students to success with the MYP objectives

In the dynamic model of curriculum, teachers design learning experiences for their students **after** they have designed the assessment task the students will engage with. Knowing what their students will have to do to show their learning, teachers will then be better placed to guide students to that assessment.

Central to understanding the Middle Years Programme and the relationship of written, assessed and learned components is a thorough understanding of the subject group objectives. A key concept to appreciate is that the subject group objectives provide the „end points“ of student learning and that the assessment criteria provide ways of measuring each student’s level of achievement. In most subject groups, there is an explicit one-to-one relationship between an objective and an assessment criterion which makes the process easier to understand. For example, Objective A might be titled “Knowledge and Understanding”; in that case, its corresponding assessment criterion A would have the same title.

The Bridge to Success website offers teachers support in designing learning experiences to prepare students for the assessment tasks. In particular, it supports teachers in understanding the commonality teaching and learning of MYP and DP. The support offered helps teachers understand how:

- their assessment practices can allow students to engage in a meaningful way with the unit question
- the learning experiences lead the student to succeed on the summative assessment
- to identify critical skills and essential knowledge needed for success on the assessment
- formative assessments built into the unit allow the teacher to determine how students are progressing and to adapt instructions where needed

3.5 Provide students different ways of showing their learning

The MYP requires teachers to consider carefully how they will allow students to demonstrate learning by adopting different strategies such as:

- **observing** – which will be particularly useful when assessing some attitudes or skill development
- **testing** – which allow the teacher to ask general or specific questions to elicit responses from students that will indicate understanding and, possibly, misunderstanding.
- **being flexible** – in which teachers provide students a stimulus and ask them to communicate an original response such as a presentation, an essay, a diagram, a solution to a problem or an innovative response (such as a podcast) depending on their interests and dispositions. Teachers need to be supportive so that students do not choose an inappropriate way to respond, and flexible so that different students can feel free to respond in a variety of ways.
- **assessing in context** – in which teachers can devise assessment tasks that enable students to **perform the skills** they have learned during a unit
- having students document their learning through:
 - **learning journals** in which they write their reflections on the subject and on their processes of learning. Student metacognition is an essential stage in that process of developing higher-order thinking skills and developing conceptual understanding.
 - **collecting a portfolio** of evidence. Portfolios, either paper-based or digital, can allow students to reflect on their learning and provide them, their parents and their teachers insights into their „learning journeys“.

3.6 Create a variety of assessment tasks

Teachers are responsible for designing tasks that are **relevant** to student learning and **engaging** so that students are more likely to want to demonstrate that learning. To broaden variety in assessments is to encourage all students to learn.

Among the variety of tasks, teachers will consider are compositions, creations, essays, examinations, questionnaires, investigations, research tasks, performances and presentations.

It must be stressed that no one type of task is the preserve of any particular subject: whereas investigations are usually conducted in science classes, teachers could develop an investigation task in a language B or PE class. Similarly, creations are usually the type of task that an arts or technology teacher might develop, yet there are many reasons why math, language A and humanities teachers should consider this type of task.

Over the course of a school year, students should be exposed to a variety of tasks. Teachers, in their teams, will need to plan out the entire sequence of assessments over each school year for each class so that they can ensure that a broad spectrum of tasks is available.

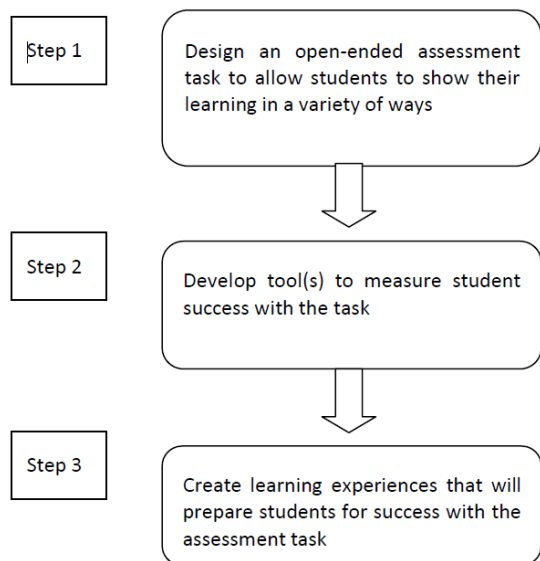


Figure 1- Backward planning of assessment

3.7 Decide how you will collect evidence of student learning

Once teachers have designed their assessment tasks for a unit, they will need to develop tools that allow them to determine what students have learned. Only then will they be in a position to create the learning experiences.

The array of assessment tools that the MYP and DP encourage teachers to use includes

- **checklists** or „grading schemes“, „marking schemes“, „checklists“ or „keys“ which can be very useful, especially if the assessment task is used by more than one section of the same class.
- **rubrics** - either holistic or analytical, can be very useful when correctly developed and systematically applied.
- **continuums** can be an extremely effective assessment tool when applied to long-term skill development, especially one that could span two academic programs.
- **anecdotal records** – notes written by the teacher on student learning, when used in conjunction with **observation** as an assessment strategy, can provide very reliable information about individual student learning and the efficacy of the assessment task.

3.8 Teach students so that they succeed

By being flexible in their approach, and by developing a range of assessment tasks and tools, teachers can increase student success on assessment tasks. The next step is to ensure that teacher instruction is designed to prepare all students for these assessment tasks.

• 3.8.1 Adapt your teaching to student needs

As teachers engage with students in their day to day interactions (using observation as an ongoing daily strategy) they will come to realize that some students understand the concept, learn the knowledge, and

develop the skills in the ways that they expected. Teachers will also realize that a number of students misunderstand the concept, confuse and misuse knowledge and are slower to develop skills when compared to their peers. It is an important part of teaching that teachers not only recognize these students' difficulties, but that they **do something about it**. By adapting instruction, teachers can help these students overcome their difficulties and ensure that their learning continues. This **formative assessment** is only useful if the teacher **adapts instruction**.

- **3.8.2 Include all your students - Plan for Differentiated Instruction**

Teachers who have a wide range of students with varying academic backgrounds will have planned for misunderstandings, confusions and a range of skill development rates by **differentiating their instructional practices**. Rather than relying on one set of learning experiences, successful teachers design multiple ways that students might approach the same concept, knowledge or skill.

By offering students a **choice** of how they approach subject content depending on their learning styles, they will feel more willing to engage with the learning.

- **3.8.3 Help students understand how they can show their learning**

Teachers should be mindful of the way that an assessment task will appear to all students. Whereas a task might be beautifully crafted to allow students to access the very highest levels of achievement, some students might struggle to understand exactly what it is they have to do. Left to themselves, some students might not engage with the task at all, and run the risk of failing to achieve.

Teachers will need to find ways to provide a “scaffold” to students so that they can access the assessment task. Scaffolding can include:

- ☐ simply dialoguing with individual students to make sure they understand what they have to do in the assessment task
- ☐ providing exemplars of work from students in other classes (suitably anonymized as appropriate)
- ☐ breaking the task down into manageable “parts” and monitoring student progress in those parts
- ☐ dialoguing frequently and working more closely with individual students to guide their thinking

A degree of scaffolding will be especially important when final year MYP students, for example, are initially exposed to Diploma Programme style assessment tasks.

3.9 Connect learning to the MYP assessment criteria

When designing an assessment task, teachers are expected to be mindful of the subject's MYP assessment criteria. If the subject content has been aligned with the MYP objectives for a subject group, then the corresponding assessment **criteria** will need to be applied when assessing student mastery of the subject matter. It is **not** appropriate to use an assessment criterion if the unit does not address its corresponding objective. This inappropriate practice could lead to the situation, for example, of a PE teacher training students to perform a layup in basketball and then “grading” students by their capacity to balance a football on their heads! This may sound a ridiculous situation; however, a number of samples of work from MYP schools have included inappropriate practices such as this.

- **3.9.1 Know the criteria that apply to each of your units**

The reality for many MYP units is that not all objectives will have been met fully – indeed, it would be a very unusual unit (and probably a very long one) if **all** the strands of **all** the objectives had been reflected in the unit's content. More usually, a unit will allow students to meet **some** strands of **some** of the objectives. Normally, then, only a few assessment criteria will apply to each unit, and again only parts of those criteria. The role of the teacher is to decide which strands of the criteria will apply to an assessment task.

- **3.9.2 Make sure all the strands of all the objectives are “covered” twice each year**

The expectation is that over the course of a school year, students **will have** been exposed to structured learning in **all** the strands of **all** the objectives and that teachers will have had opportunities to collect sufficient evidence of learning so that they can apply the assessment criteria.

- **3.9.3 Get “up close and personal” with your subject's assessment criteria**

The assessment criteria are the “constants” that pervade the whole Middle Years Programme's assessment model. To understand them deeply is to really “get” the MYP approach to the subject. Teachers, in their teaching teams, should strive to understand not only the various strands in each descriptor, but the *implications* of such strands and levels. In this way, they can clarify for students what learning „looks like” in each criterion and at each level.

- **3.9.4 Teach your students what the assessment criteria mean**

Your students will understand the assessment task even better if you connect their learning with the assessment tool you will use to measure that learning. Successful MYP and DP teachers share their understandings of the assessment criteria with their students. Those teachers involve their students in the development of task-specific rubrics, so that they really understand what they have to do before they do it.

Working with students on the development of assessment tools can increase their understanding of the assessment criteria to a point where they can engage in critical self-evaluation of their own work and the work of their peers. By providing feedback to students that is based on the assessment criteria descriptors not only deepen their understanding of those criteria, it allows them to connect their learning to the objectives of the programme.

3.10 Think like a detective

At some points during the school year, normally the end of a semester or the year, administrators require student grades. MYP teachers should see this **Summative Assessment** as a professional process and not as a single event.

In some school systems, summative assessment hinges on student scores in a terminal exam. In this model, students' raw scores are compounded with a "grade" for work completed during the semester, typically tests, quizzes and homework. This is **not** the IB model of summative assessment.

In the IB, summative assessment is a process that requires the assessor to take **all evidence of learning** into account and then make a **professional judgment** of the student's achievement according to the pre-defined criteria. It should be very clear that if teachers are required to take all evidence of learning into account, they need to **look for it** and **document it**.

3.13 Bring it all together

Given the above twelve major points on MYP assessment, the over-riding theme that emerges is one of open, transparent processes that collectively exist to support and encourage student learning.

To foster these processes, teachers are encouraged to:

- ☐ view assessment as a process that is integrated with planning and with learning
- ☐ use a range and balance of assessment strategies
- ☐ involve students in assessment
- ☐ look for evidence of student learning
- ☐ seek student responses to evaluate their current understanding and to plan the way forward
- ☐ give students regular and ongoing feedback on their learning
- ☐ enable students to see assessment as a means of describing learning and improving learning.