

Teacher-designed tasks and tests

What are teacher-designed tasks and tests?

Tasks and tests can take the form of written or oral assessments or practical assignments developed by the teacher to assess children's learning. They can be used throughout the school year as a basis for continuous assessment (AfL). Tasks and tests can also be used at the end of an academic year or at the end of a period of learning about a certain topic for the purpose of AoL. However, tasks and tests can serve both AoL and AfL at the same time, since teachers may firstly report the results of tasks and tests and then use the results to decide what they should teach and how they should approach each topic.

What is the value of teacher-designed tasks and tests as an assessment method?

Tasks or tests provide opportunities for children to demonstrate their levels of understanding (or misunderstanding) and their skills, and offer valuable information that can be used to plan future work directed towards the children's needs.

General guidelines for developing a teacher-designed paper and pencil test

- Identify the purpose of the test at the outset and design the test to meet this purpose.
- Try to formulate questions which relate to the children's own interests as this helps make the test relevant and motivating for children.
- Start with some easy questions that all the children can answer in order to help them overcome their nerves and feel confident that they can succeed.
- Include at least two types of problems in tests. When only one type of problem is contained on the page the children quickly pick up on this pattern, and it discourages them from reading and thinking about the problems. New problems can be mixed in with ones that the children can solve already in order to provide opportunities for children to show different degrees of integration of knowledge and different levels of ability.
- As far as possible write questions using a simple subject-verb-object structure, even when this may result in more words being used. For example: Instead of writing:

Example A

*Blue paint is added to a jam-jar containing yellow coloured water.
The colour of the water changes.
What colour does it become?*

The question could be phrased as:

Example B

*Laura has a jam-jar containing yellow coloured water.
She adds blue paint to the jam-jar.
The colour of the water in the jam-jar changes.
What colour is it now?*

Using a child's name as in example B also allows for the use of more simple, direct sentence structures.

- Avoid using double negatives in questions.
- Think about the overall layout of the test, and how the information will be presented. For example, a single question should be contained on one page to help children follow questions more easily.
- **Give key information in bold.** The use of pictures and labelled diagrams can help to make questions more accessible.
- Vary the questions so that they assess the children's reasoning skills behind their answers and the methods they use. (See Appendix A, pp. 89-90 for more information on developing test questions.)

How are teacher-designed tasks used?

Many teacher-designed tasks involve children working in small groups. For assessment purposes, a high level of interaction between the teacher and the group of children is recommended. In order for this to occur, the teacher may decide that it is necessary for just one group to work on the activity while the remaining children are engaged in other work that does not involve much input or supervision from the teacher. (See Appendix A, p. 88 for a guide to using a sample task planning sheet, and Appendix B, p. 94 for a photocopiable planning sheet.)

Feedback on tasks and tests

The use of grades or external rewards such as stickers for feedback on tasks and tests is generally of limited help to children in AfL. The main purpose of providing feedback is to give information to children about where they achieved success in relation to the learning intentions and where they might improve. Children need time to read or talk about the feedback as well as time to make improvements based on it.

