

Purposeful Planning: Building Assessments that Teach and Measure

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A well-designed assessment is more than a measure of learning. It is an instructional tool. Purposeful assessments clarify expectations, provide meaningful evidence of student understanding, and guide teachers' next instructional decisions. When assessment is intentionally aligned to standards, Historical Thinking Skills, PLDs, and appropriate levels of cognitive demand, it becomes an essential part of the learning process rather than simply the end of it.

Effective assessment does more than evaluate. It sharpens our focus on what students need to know and be able to do. When designed intentionally, assessments guide instruction, provide meaningful feedback, and build student confidence. This article explores practical strategies for designing classroom assessments that measure learning, support instruction, and provide meaningful feedback.

Begin with the Standard

Begin by identifying the specific indicator or set of indicators you're assessing. Each indicator includes a Historical Thinking Skill and a specific performance expectation. Your assessment questions should align directly to both. If the indicator prompts causation, then your questions must go beyond recall. They must ask students to connect, explain, or reason through historical relationships.

Use the PLDs to help visualize what performance looks like across levels. Ask: What does it look like when a student minimally meets expectations on this indicator? What does it look like when they exceed them?

Balance Cognitive Demand

EOCEP-style assessments don't rely solely on recall. The test blueprint makes clear that a large proportion of items fall at DOK 2 and 3. This means students must be able to apply knowledge, not just repeat it.

When planning your assessment, aim for a balance:

- **DOK 1:** One foundational question to confirm essential content
- **DOK 2:** A question requiring categorization, comparison, or interpretation
- **DOK 3:** An item that requires students to justify or synthesize using reasoning

Use a mix of item types to match EOCEP formats (SR, MS, EB, TECR). These formats support rigor and reflect what students will encounter on the exam.

Review the Assessment as a Whole

Before using an assessment, step back and evaluate it as a complete learning tool.

Ask yourself:

- Does every question align to the intended standard?
- Are students demonstrating the Historical Thinking Skill?
- Is there an appropriate balance of DOK levels?
- Do the item types reflect EOCEP expectations?
- Will student responses provide useful evidence to guide future instructional decisions?

Build Feedback Into the Assessment

The most effective assessments are not just about grading; they support learning. Use PLDs to guide feedback. PLDs should inform assessment design before instruction, guide feedback during learning, and help determine appropriate next steps after students complete the assessment.

For example:

- If a student chose a correct fact but missed a reasoning question, use “Meets” and “Minimally Meets” language from the PLDs to explain why the answer lacks depth.
- For open-ended tasks, identify what performance level the student met and what their next level of thinking might look like.

You can also include reflective prompts or student-facing rubrics to help students self-assess using the PLDs.

Final Thought:

When you plan with purpose, assessments become more than just measurement tools. They become part of the learning process itself. They show students what mastery looks like, provide meaningful feedback, and equip teachers to support students at every stage of learning.