

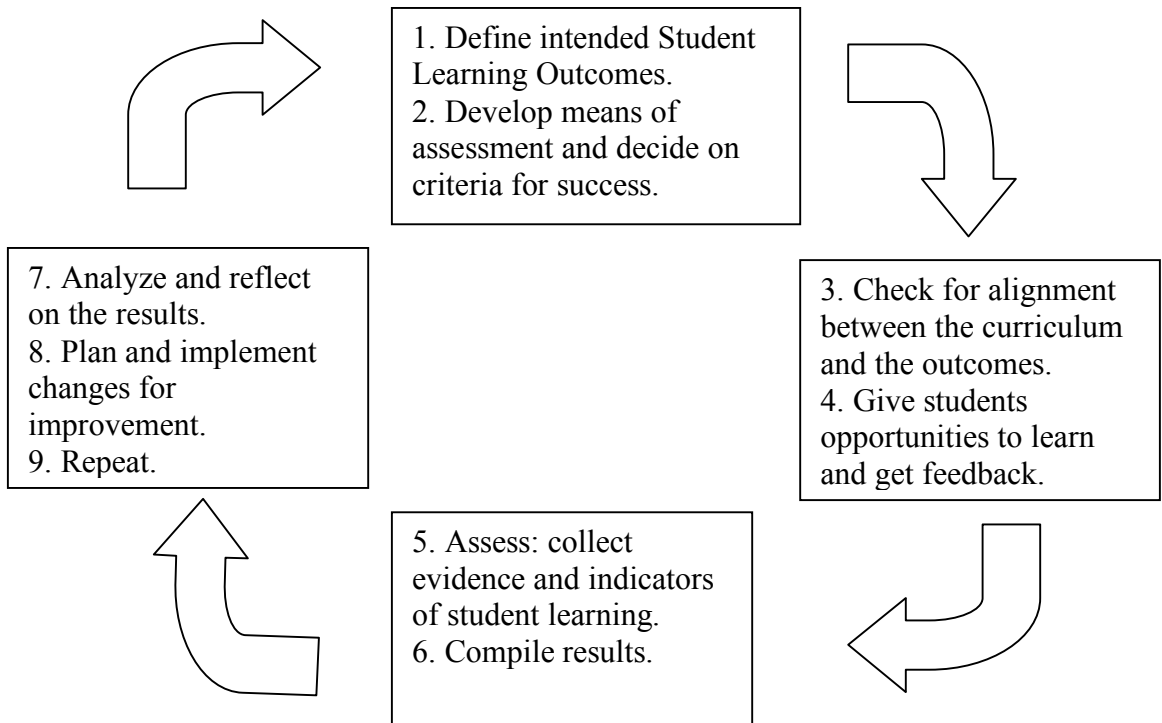
# Overview of the Assessment Process

## Steps in the Assessment Cycle

For each area (course, program, degree, certificate, student services unit, etc.), we are required to:

1. Define our expected student learning outcomes (what we would like students to learn from the course/program/etc.).
2. Develop means of assessment and decide on criteria for success.
3. Check for alignment between the curriculum and the outcomes.
4. Give students opportunities to learn.
5. Assess whether or not that learning has occurred.
6. Compile assessment results.
7. Analyze and reflect on the information.
8. Plan and implement changes as a result of what we learned from the assessment. (This is often called “closing the loop”.)
9. Repeat. (This must be an ongoing process throughout the years - not only when we’re preparing for accreditation!)

## The Assessment Cycle



### **What ACCJC wants to see:**

- SLOs are regularly assessed in an ongoing, systematic way
- There is dialogue about the meaning of the results and about possible strategies for improvement.
- The assessment results are used to implement changes for improvement (“closing the loop”).

### **Assessment vs. Grades**

Sometimes, when instructors first hear about assessment, they are under the mistaken impression that we already do assessment when we assign grades to students. It turns out that assessment isn't the same as assigning grades. Grades alone do not give enough information on specific strengths and weaknesses of students or of the class as a whole. For example, if a student gets a B in a class, that B grade doesn't tell us whether the student submitted consistently very good work or if the student did excellent work on some assignments and average work on other assignments. In addition, grading standards might be vague or inconsistent, while assessment information is very specific.

Assessment information can tell you what aspects the entire class did well on or things that were difficult for many students. Instead of focusing on how individual students performed, assessment results give us information on what aspects or assignments most students had trouble with, and by using the assessment results for improvement, the instructor can focus on improving the course or the delivery or the assignments so that a greater proportion of students are successful, or so that deeper learning occurs for more students.

Assessment is not meant to identify individual students or individual instructors. It will not be used for faculty evaluation. There is no shame in having disappointing assessment results, as long as you make a plan for improvement and then actually implement the plan. What's important is willingness, curiosity, and honesty. If we focus on questions or goals that are too easy, we're missing the point and missing valuable opportunities for making things better.

#### **Laney College Assessment Philosophy**

Assessment practices at Laney College ensure quality educational opportunities that respond to the needs of the local and global community. Assessment is an ongoing process that improves student learning and institutional effectiveness through dialogue based on evidence. We value honesty, integrity, curiosity, and the courage to ask deep and interesting questions about student learning, our instructional practices, our student services, and our effectiveness as a learner-centered college.

## Writing Student Learning Outcomes

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) describe what a student should be able to DO at the end of a course or program.

- SLOs use action verbs from Bloom’s Taxonomy with an emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- There should be 3-8 SLOs for each class or program. When in doubt, fewer is better. Between 3 - 5 outcomes is optimal.
- **Course SLOs should be included in course syllabi. Program SLOs should be published on the department’s website.**
- SLOs should be the same for all sections of a course. However, each instructor may include on their course syllabi additional outcomes and/or course expectations.
- SLOs should be written in language that students (and those outside the field) are able to understand.
- SLOs are typically not content-specific.
- SLOs should focus on big-picture, overarching concepts, skills, or attitudes.
- SLOs must be observable.
- Avoid starting SLOs with the words such as “understand”, “learn”, “know”, etc. since these indicate internal mental processes for the students. Focus instead on what students will be able to do, produce, or demonstrate.

### Common Mistakes in writing SLOs:

Please **avoid** writing SLOs that start like this:

- “Become familiar with...”
- “Demonstrate an understanding of...”
- “Demonstrate knowledge of...”
- “Know...”
- “Learn...”
- “Understand...”

Why? Because these are not observable.

Most or all of the SLOs for college-level classes must be higher-level thinking skills. On the Bloom’s taxonomy charts, this corresponds to using verbs from the columns on the

right half of the page (analysis, synthesis, and evaluation). Interestingly, multiple-choice tests cannot be used to assess higher-level thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis.

**More information on writing SLOs, including verbs from Bloom’s Taxonomy and many examples of SLOs can be found at:**

<http://www.laney.peralta.edu/SLOs>

Click on “Documents” in the upper left part of the page. See the document “Domains for SLOs” for a list of Bloom’s Taxonomy verbs. There are also many SLO examples on this site.

## **Types of Assessment Methods**

There are many different assessment methods to choose from. For the most reliable results, it is best to assess each outcome in more than one way.

**Direct Assessment Methods:** (these involve examining and evaluating student work)

- Tests or specific test questions that faculty write – these can be used to assess certain questions that apply to stated SLOs
- Embedded assignments (term papers, projects, lab reports, case studies, other assignments)
- Performance evaluations (oral speech, debate, dance/music/theatrical/physical performance)
- Portfolios (a collection of the student’s work over time)
- Standardized tests

**Indirect Assessment Methods:** (these explore indicators of student learning, and can provide information about attitudes, values, and the like. These are not guarantees of student learning, but indicators that they have probably learned. These methods are also useful for finding out why students did or didn’t learn and for coming up with ideas for possible improvements/changes.)

- Surveys (satisfaction surveys, perception surveys)
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Reflective essays/writing samples

Most sources recommend using at least one direct assessment method for each outcome. This should be supplemented by an additional assessment method – either direct or indirect.

Keep in mind that **the method of assessment must “fit” the outcome being assessed.** For example, in order to assess whether or not students are able to write an effective lab report, one would have to have students write a lab report and then evaluate their written

reports using some clear grading criteria. It would NOT make sense to assess their lab report writing using an exam.

Here are some more examples:

<b>If your SLO is:</b>	<b>The assessment method should include:</b>
Formulate and communicate persuasive arguments for particular audiences for specific outcomes. (English 5)	Analysis of student papers in which they formulate and communicate persuasive arguments.
Solve algebraic equations and inequalities. (Math 200A)	Analysis of selected test questions in which students solve algebraic equations and inequalities.
Critically analyze political information and news. (Political Science 1)	Evaluation of written current events analyses produced by students.
Demonstrate safe use of electrical tools and instruments for proper wiring and troubleshooting equipment and controls (ECT 11)	Analysis of test questions on safe use of electrical tools and instruments. Observations of laboratory skills and adhering to safety guidelines.
Construct and deliver a clear, well-organized verbal presentation (Communication 1A)	Evaluation of student-prepared speeches using a rubric.
Create photo stories and provide documentation in the form of captions and a written statement. (Photojournalism)	Evaluation of photo stories submitted by students.

In each case above, in order to assess the outcome, you must create an assessment tool or scoring guide (rubric). These scoring guides will be used to evaluate student work and to collect the assessment information.

Keep in mind that we're not expected to assess every outcome every semester! That would be too much to do at once. Each department should decide on an assessment plan in which all outcomes are eventually assessed. Maybe one or two outcomes could be assessed each semester for each class. It's also important that we "close the loop" – that we use the results for improvement. That's the whole point of assessment! (The accreditation team will be looking for this.)

## **Introduction to Rubrics**

A rubric is a very flexible grading tool that can be used to clarify your expectations, make grading more efficient, promote student learning, and assess student learning. Rubrics are especially useful for grading complex, subjective assignments that don't have just one "right" answer, such as papers, reports, and performances.

Rubrics include a list of dimensions or aspects of the assignment (such as "organization", "argumentation", "creativity", "use of color", "depth of analysis", etc.). For each dimension, there is a description of the highest level of achievement. This represents what the student should be aiming for. In addition, there are descriptions of the lower levels of achievement for each dimension. A rubric is typically given to the

students ahead of time, before they turn in their assignments. Ideally, it is given to them at the time the assignment is made.

Rubrics can and should be used to make your expectations clear to your students. Rubrics can also be used to collect assessment results for accreditation and for analysis and improvement of your class or program.

## **Why use Rubrics?**

Here are some compelling reasons for using rubrics in our classes:

- Rubrics make our expectations clear to students, so they can focus their time and energy on the aspects of the assignment that are most important. The characteristics of excellent work are spelled out for the students (without giving away any answers), so students know what they should be striving to perform on the assignment.
- When your expectations and grading criteria are clearly provided for students, there are far fewer arguments about grades (“She got an A but I only got a B. Why? I don’t understand. It’s not fair!”)
- Rubrics save grading time. When grading with a rubric, simply circle the appropriate description for each aspect of the assignment instead of making lengthy comments on each student’s paper. If you know of a common type of error or a comment that you frequently write on student papers, include it on the rubric. When students make that mistake, just circle the item on the rubric.
- Using a rubric allows you to grade consistently. This is especially helpful if more than one person is grading the assignment. However, even if you’re the only person grading the assignment, it helps you be more consistent, since your grading standards are right there in front of you.
- Since using a rubric can allow you to grade assignments faster, students get feedback sooner, and can then make adjustments and corrections as soon as possible. Students can get the most out of feedback if it is given soon after they complete the assignment.
- Rubrics provide an efficient way of conveying useful feedback to students. When their assignments are returned and they look over the completed rubric, they have a clear sense of where their strengths and weaknesses are. Since the description of the highest performance level is also on the rubric, they also have an idea of what they need to do to improve.
- Rubrics can help students evaluate their work and that of others. By comparing their work to the performance standards of the rubric, students can learn to recognize and produce quality work.

- Rubrics can be used to help us refine our teaching skills. When you use a rubric to grade assignments, you can easily make photocopies of the completed rubrics before returning them to students. One can then tally how the class did overall on each dimension of the assignment. A look at the tally can tell you the strong and weak points of the entire class. This information can be used to modify or improve the class. What should you be spending more time or effort on? The results of the tally give you evidence for what is working well and what could be improved. The next time you teach this class, you can grade the same assignment again and see if there's any change in class results as a result of the changes/improvements you made. Surprise! You are performing assessment and "closing the loop".
- Rubrics can be used for assessment. By tallying how a class (or students in a program) performed on different aspects of the assignment, it becomes clear where the problem areas are. This information can be used to improve or make changes to an individual class or to an entire program. You can track how students perform on particular aspects over several semesters to gauge the effects of teaching modifications and improvements.
- Rubrics are very flexible and can be created to suit any assignment or situation. However, rubrics do take some time to create. Some examples of rubrics can be found on the Laney College rubrics website (see below).
- There are also online tools to help make creating a rubric easier for you. After you have developed a rubric for a particular assignment, you can easily use it in subsequent semesters with little if any modifications. Once you create a rubric, the work is mostly done. Also, if you have similar kinds of assignments, once you make one rubric you can modify it slightly to fit other assignments.

Laney College Rubrics Website: <http://www.laney.peralta.edu/rubrics>

RubiStar: Rubric creation website: <http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>

### **How to construct a rubric**

1. Decide on a manageable number of important dimensions of the assignment. (For example: organization, clarity, grammar/mechanics, depth of analysis, creativity, etc.)
2. For each dimension, define "exemplary" performance. Be as specific as possible.
3. Decide how many performance levels you would like to include. Decide on the labels for each performance level. Examples:
  - Excellent, competent, needs work (3 levels)
  - Exemplary, competent, developing (3 levels)
  - Accomplished, proficient, developing, beginning (4 levels)

- Distinguished, proficient, intermediate, novice (4 levels)
- Well done, satisfactory, needs work, incomplete (4 levels)
- Excellent, good, adequate, needs work, incomplete (5 levels)

4. Define the remaining performance levels (“good”, “adequate”, “needs work”, etc.) for each dimension. Be as specific as possible.

5. Assign points for each category. Make sure that the number of points assigned corresponds to the appropriate grade according to your grading scale. Each dimension can be weighted differently, since there may be some aspects of the assignment that are more important than others.

If using a rubric seems too formulaic to you, it’s possible to build some flexibility into the rubric. If creativity or extra effort is important to you, just include it as one of the dimensions of the rubric and weight it accordingly.

TaskStream includes a rubric-creating tool called the “Rubric Wizard”. It is very easy to use and modify. See the TaskStream information at the end of this handout.

### **How to use a rubric to collect assessment information**

1. Hand out the rubric to your students along with the assignment. Discuss in class how it will be used.
2. When students turn in their completed work, grade it using the rubric. Use one rubric per student. For each student, circle appropriate items on the rubric when grading, add comments if necessary, and add up the points.
3. Make photocopies of the completed rubrics.
4. Staple the completed rubric to the assignment and return the work to students.
5. For each component/dimension/primary trait (organization, analysis, voice, content, etc.), tally the number of students in each performance category. (For example, how many students had “excellent” organization? How many had “good” organization? How many had organization that “needs work”?)
6. Analyze the results. Were there any dimensions/primary traits that had low overall scores? Focus your improvement efforts on those aspects. (What could you do differently in class? More explanation of that aspect? A clearer handout explaining that aspect? An additional assignment that specifically focuses on that aspect? More practice? More feedback? Providing a model?)
7. Report on your results and the improvements made as a result of the assessment.



## Example Rubric

### Philosophy and Humanities Essay and Class Participation Rubric

Developed by Amir Sabzevary

CATEGORY	1.Below Standards	2.Approaching Standards	3.Meets Standards	4.Above Standards
Class Discussions and explanations	Does not participate in class discussions; explanations are unclear and confusing.	Participates in class discussions only when called upon; does not have a clear understanding of the discussion context; explanations are incomplete does not evidence full understanding.	Participates in class discussions voluntarily; at times, however, unengaged while others are speaking; explanations are clear and complete, but does not evidence full understanding	Enthusiastically and articulately expresses ideas and actively listens and responds to peers; explanations are clear and complete showing understanding of ideas.
Organization and mechanics of essay	Unorganized and unclear Frequent errors in spelling grammar, and punctuation	Meets half of the requirements; relatively well-organized; however, ideas loosely related and many errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.	Well- organized and meets most requirements; Ideas are contextually relevant; Occasional grammatical errors	Well-organized and meets all requirements; reflects clear reflection and expression of insights; nearly error-free reflecting clear understanding and thorough proofreading.
Creativity	Fulfils minimum requirements but with no originality.	Fulfils minimum requirements with some new ideas and originality, but little follow-through.	Fulfils minimum requirements and presents many new and insightful ideas.	Fulfils minimum requirements and presents many new ideas that exceed the requirements.
References	No references or incorrect references.	Few references or some incorrect references.	Use of references indicating some research.	Use of references indicating substantial research.
Final Draft/Publication	Final draft shows little evidence of editing and revision.	Final draft shows some evidence of editing and revision.	Final draft shows clear evidence of editing and revision.	Final draft shows clear evidence of thoughtful editing and revision.

## How to Assess SLOs in Your Department – Step by Step

**Keep in mind: the purpose of assessing SLOs is to use evidence of student learning as a basis for improvement.**  
**We are to be continually assessing SLOs, reflecting on the results, and implementing changes and improvements.**

### Step 1

- Decide which courses to assess.
- Focus on important core courses first.

### Step 2

- Set up a meeting of all (or most) instructors who teach that course.
- Make sure to have a sign-in list and request professional development credit for all meetings.

### Step 3

- At the meeting, decide which SLOs to assess.
- Choose something that you really care about.
- Decide what kind of assignment to use to assess the outcome.
- Develop an assessment tool (or rubric) together, so that all instructors will be evaluating the assignment in the same way.
- Discuss the rubric and its use. Consider having a “norming” session so that all instructors will be scoring the assignments in the same way.
- If you want to save time, someone can come up with a draft rubric ahead of time, and participants can suggest changes.
- Decide what constitutes “successful” attainment of the outcome and what percentage of students you’d like to see successfully meeting the standards.
- Assign someone to enter this information into the “Assessment Plan” in TaskStream.
- Decide when to perform the assessment, and when to meet again to analyze and discuss the results.
- Send reminders to make sure that participants remember to perform the assessment.

### Step 4

- All instructors use the assessment tool to assess their students’ performance on the selected assignment. Tally the number of students in each category for each aspect of the rubric.
- Keep copies of the completed rubrics or surveys.

### **Step 5**

- One of the instructors should collect the information from the other instructors and combine it to come up with the overall results.

### **Step 6**

- Set up another meeting.
- At this meeting (or before), have the results of the assessment available for all participants. (It's good to include each instructor's results and the compiled results.)
- Have someone take notes at all meetings.
- Strive for an attitude of honest curiosity. Everyone must feel safe in order for this process to have its intended effect.
- Discuss these results. What do these results mean? What are the problem areas overall? What are the strong areas? What did you learn from this assessment?
- Plan changes that you think would improve student performance. See if there are tips or techniques you can learn from each other.
- There are things individual instructors can do to improve results, and other improvements that might require changes in the course or program itself. Decide how to follow through with these changes and assign a responsible person to make sure it happens.
- Enter this information in the "Assessment Findings" and "Action Plan" in TaskStream. Upload the notes from your departmental dialogue/discussions when you submit assessment information.

### **Step 7**

- Implement the changes, and then later assess this outcome again.
- Note if there was an improvement in student learning.
- Enter this information in the "Status Report" in TaskStream.

### **Step 8**

- Meanwhile, plan other assessments for this course and other courses in your department.
- Plan the assessment of program outcomes, if your department offers any degrees or certificates.
- Make the assessment of SLOs a normal part of your routine each semester.
- Discuss assessment plans, results, and action plans at department meetings.

## **Ideas for changes/improvements that a department could pursue:**

### **Possible Options for Improving Student Learning in the Classroom:**

- State goals or objectives of assignment/activity more explicitly
- Revise content of assignment/activities
- Revise the amount of writing/oral/visual/clinical or similar work
- Revise activities leading up to and/or supporting assignment/activities
- Increase in-class discussions and activities
- Increase student collaboration and/or peer review
- Provide more frequent or more comprehensive feedback on student progress
- Increase guidance for students as they work on assignments
- Use methods of questioning that encourage the competency you measured
- State criteria for grading more explicitly
- As an instructor, increase your interaction with students outside of class
- Ask a colleague to critique assignments/activities
- Collect more data

### **Possible Options for Improving Student Learning in the Department:**

- Offer/encourage attendance at seminars, workshops or discussion groups about teaching methods
- Consult teaching and learning experts about teaching methods
- Encourage faculty to share activities that foster competency
- Write collaborative grants to fund departmental projects to improve teaching
- Purchase articles/books on teaching about competency
- Visit classrooms to provide feedback (mentoring)
- Create bibliography of resource material
- Have binder available for rubrics and results
- Analyze course curriculum so that the department can build a progression of skills as students advance through courses
- Develop supplemental instruction opportunities (tutoring, study groups, small group work sessions, etc.)

## Useful Websites:

Assessment Tools and Rubrics:

<http://www.laney.peralta.edu/rubrics>

This site contains information on developing rubrics. There are also many examples of rubrics created by Laney College faculty. Click on “Handouts and Examples” to view them. It’s helpful to look at a wide variety of rubrics to get ideas.

Learning Assessment Committee website:

<http://www.laney.peralta.edu/learningassessment>

Check the “documents” section for the complete “SLO and Assessment Manual” that you can download.

SLO reporting website: has SLOs that have been submitted and approved so far.

<http://www.laney.peralta.edu/SLOreporting>

How to Write SLOs website:

<http://www.laney.peralta.edu/SLOs>

SLO/Assessment reporting forms can be found at:

<http://www.laney.peralta.edu/SLOforms>

Laney's General Education Outcomes:

<http://www.laney.peralta.edu/GEOutcomes>

Contact information for Cheli Fossum (SLO/Assessment Coordinator)

[mfossum@peralta.edu](mailto:mfossum@peralta.edu)

510-464-3272

Please enter completed work into TaskStream.  
It will be reviewed within the TaskStream system.

Or... send completed work to Cheli for review, approval, and recordkeeping.  
(SLOs, program outcomes, rubrics, etc.)

### **TaskStream**

<http://www.taskstream.com>

For support using TaskStream:

[help@taskstream.com](mailto:help@taskstream.com)

1-800-311-5656