ASSESSING FOR TRANSFER AND APPLICATION

PURPOSE
This tool provides techniques for assessing student learning in a way that deepens their understanding, enables their application of knowledge, and strengthens their ability to transfer their knowledge for use in new settings.

DESCRIPTION
Learning by faith is at the heart of assessing for transfer and application. The Learning Model document describes, “learning to act in accordance with one’s faith in Christ is fundamental to enjoying deep, life-changing learning.” This tool is defined by assessment activities where students act in faith.

Two things must happen before assessing for transfer and application:
1. Learning outcomes must be stated in a way that captures the desired deeper understanding of concepts and their relationships to one another.
2. Learning activities in the course have provided students an opportunity to use their knowledge in context.

A student’s learning is enabled and solidified when it is tied to their previous knowledge. Students are not likely to learn if they are unable to connect the new to the old. Similarly, for learning to persist into the future, students must apply their knowledge and transfer it to new contexts. Through the processes of application and transfer, new knowledge and understanding become an integrated part of the student, not likely to be forgotten.

Short Term Learning Assessments
Common assessment methods are quizzes, multiple choice exams, short essay, etc. These types of assessment are concerned primarily with what a student can recall about a particular topic. Short-term assessments can be useful as preliminary or formative assessments. However, they do not have the ability to capture deeper understanding, application, or transfer.

Long-Term Learning Assessments
Other assessments are more able to measure long-term learning, understanding, and application. These types of assessments attempt to predict a student’s ability in the months or years ahead based on what they are learning today. This type of assessment is tied to deeper outcomes, such as a student’s ability to create, connect, synthesize, or become. The assessments associated with these outcomes allow students to explain themselves and to support their ideas. They allow students to show how they know in addition to what they know.

The general strategy for this type of assessment activity typically involves students writing, developing, or creating, along with multiple opportunities for feedback and revision.

Assessment Strategies
There are many specific strategies that you can use to assess for application and transfer. No one strategy will describe a student’s ability. Multiple strategies will help to best capture a student’s progress. Some of the strategies include:

- **Papers/Presentations.** These approaches allow students to demonstrate their conceptually applied knowledge either in a written or oral format.
- **Portfolio.** Either electronic or in physical form, a portfolio is a collection of a students work, a collective view of their various applications of knowledge.
- **Diverse problem-sets and/or cases.** These give students an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge in various settings with changing emphasis on different variables.
- **Simulations.** Similar to diverse problem-sets and cases, simulations allow for students to apply their knowledge in a controlled environment. This can be better for learning than real-world application as the real-world complexities can be temporarily simplified, allowing the student to focus on key principles of skills. They also allow students to participate in new situations that require the use of previously learned knowledge.

http://www.byui.edu/learning-and-teaching/instructional-tools
Real world application. (In all its complexity.) Field work, service-learning, and internships are various examples of this approach.

Feedback Strategies
A critical, and challenging, dimension to assessing for application and transfer is providing sufficient feedback to students. This involves creating a safe environment where students can try new things, explore new ideas, and fail without feeling like a failure. Then, creating a setting where students can receive guidance, encouragement, and feedback, with an opportunity to try again and then again. You can provide an environment and rubrics where students can self-assess their work. Similar rubrics can provide enough structure and guidance that peer-assessment is very valuable. With self- and peer-assessment activities happening continually, you are in a position to identify and respond to fundamental areas or particular students that need feedback in particular ways.

Example
An outcome of one course in education is for students to be able to create curriculum and write lesson plans. The students work together in practicing the various components. At key times during the semester, the students apply all of the components together in an exercise that allows them to synthesize what they have learned and create something new at the same time. Within certain dates, students are allowed to make and submit changes to their work based on feedback from peers and the instructor, describing why they made the changes.

Another campus course seeks to identify student understanding and ability through a type of triangulation of assessment strategies. This involves individual and group papers, quizzes, pre-class and post-class discussion board postings and responses, and in-class comments.

In the Communication Foundations course, students work throughout the semester is preparation for and culminates in a final presentation in which the key skills they have developed during the semester are demonstrated.

TIPS
- Use assessment strategies initially to determine students’ prior learning. Tie all new learning activities to prior learning.
- Put assessments in context. Putting assessments in context (real or simulated) is foundational to understanding, application, and transfer.
- Treat feedback as a process, not an event.

PITFALLS
- Be willing to adjust. This type of assessment requires increased student (and instructor) energy and time. Content coverage and instructional methods may need to be adjusted to gain deeper understanding, application, and transfer.
- Let students assess. Assessment methods are more time consuming if the instructor is involved in every assessment. Self- and peer-assessment can be very valuable.

Key Articles

Other Resources
- Authentic Education