

Assessing performance expectations

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Given that the *Next Generation Science Standards* (NGSS) describe learning in terms of performance expectations, it only makes sense that our assessments mirror these. A performance task is an excellent assessment vehicle because it allows students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and proficiency through a product or performance, rather than with a traditional objective test. Well-designed tasks that reflect the NGSS three-dimensional approach to science teaching require multiple components generally made up of a “set of interrelated questions” (NRC 2014, p. 3). Developing these types of assessments can be challenging, so you may want to consider using field-tested resources such as the NGSS Classroom Sample Tasks or questions released from National Assessment of Educational Progress (see Resources). To view sample performance tasks that measure both content and practice, see chapter 4 of *Developing Assessments for the Next Generation Science Standards* (NRC 2014). The book, which is available as a free download, contains examples of assessments for all grade levels.

Unfortunately, many states are struggling to develop three-dimensional assessments. Consequently, teachers may find themselves preparing students for a traditional state test rather than one that mirrors the NGSS. Given that the tested content likely was taught over a span of several years and includes multiple science disciplines, this can be an overwhelming task. Help your students make relationships between concepts by using an integrated approach that encourages them to connect their current learning to concepts covered in previous courses. If you have access to diagnostic tests, consider administering them early in the year, with remediation for specific areas of weakness provided throughout the year. You could also administer practice tests or use released test questions as bell ringers. (Check your state education site for released questions.) Finally, investing the time to teach test-taking strategies can benefit your students by relieving test anxiety—a beneficial outcome when the test is a traditional assessment rather than a performance task.

Patty McGinnis
Editor, *Science Scope*

REFERENCE

National Research Council [NRC]. 2014. *Developing assessments for the Next Generation Science Standards*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. www.nap.edu/catalog/18409/developing-assessments-for-the-next-generation-science-standards.

RESOURCES

National Assessment of Educational Progress’s complete task library—www.nationsreportcard.gov/science_2009/ict_tasks.aspx
NGSS classroom sample tasks—www.nextgenscience.org/classroom-sample-assessment-tasks

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