



# The University of Texas at Austin Faculty Innovation Center

## Discussing Assessment and Evaluations in Teaching Statements

*For each of the following teaching statement excerpts, identify how the instructor assesses student learning. Does the instructor incorporate a diversity of assessment methods? Does the instructor tie the assessment method back to their teaching goals and strategies?*

**Excerpt 1:** “In my geoscience laboratories, hands-on learning was the purpose of each assignment. I began each lab with a brief (2-minute) review followed by a short quiz on the previous lab’s activity to reinforce key concepts and assess their understanding. Then I introduced new material and set the expectation for completion of the assignment. During a lesson on different types of faults (like the San Andreas Fault), for example, I supplemented visual images by drawing key aspects on a whiteboard in real-time. I then had students practice sliding actual block sets to give them hands-on experience with how faulted rocks move relative to each other in 3D. I assessed their mastery of the topic by watching them demonstrate to each other not only how faults behave, but why it matters in the context of Earth processes like mountain building and natural hazard risks such as earthquakes and tsunamis.”

**Excerpt 2:** “I believe in student-centered teaching that is responsive to students’ backgrounds, interests, and goals. Deep learning occurs when students connect what they are learning in class to other aspects of their lives (e.g. their relationships, future careers) and the world (e.g. current events, political movements). Social scientific research is inherently relevant in all people’s lives, and I make this explicit in my teaching. For example, when assessing students, I am most interested in whether they are able to apply principles that we have learned in class to examples in their own lives. Therefore, I write scenario-based quiz questions rather than asking students to memorize facts from the lectures or readings.... Similarly, because research has shown that continuous assessment results in better learning than summative assessment, in Introduction to Psychology and Social Psychology, I quizzed students every time the class met about what they learned in the previous class, rather than administering midterm or final exams. These daily quizzes were cumulative in that the questions asked students to integrate recent concepts with concepts from earlier classes, and one quiz question was always programmed to be on a topic that the student missed previously. The nature of these quizzes encourages students to focus on growth and improvement because no one quiz is determinative of one’s grade. With enough effort, a student who starts out failing can end up at the top of the class because students are given space to experiment with study methods to determine what is right for them. I also model the importance of continuous improvement by seeking feedback from students on my own teaching effectiveness. For example, the first time I was a teaching assistant for Introduction to Psychology, I instituted a rating system in which students evaluated the lecture at the end of each class. This practice, which the course has retained, allows the instructors to compare the difficulty and interest level of lectures within and across semesters.”

**Excerpt 3:** “I hope in the future to integrate traditional testing with more creative projects to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge in diverse ways. In my syllabus, I designed for a U.S. History after 1865 course, I created a fast-paced class involving reading, writing, and group discussion. Each Friday, students are required to submit a one page weekly response essay summarizing the reading’s key arguments, connecting the readings to lecture, and offering their own critical assessment of the readings. These offer a way for me to check for understanding with students, and also provide them with many

opportunities to improve their writing. Second, I developed a document analysis assignment where students choose a primary source, describe the argument and purpose, contextualize the document, and critique its perspective. This helps students evaluate various arguments about U.S. history from historical and contemporary narratives, while also locating and evaluating sources of evidence within the context of time and place. In order to engage digitally minded students, I require a podcast roundtable assignment. Groups of four students form an academic panel based around one of the classes themes, and then offer an “experts take” on a particular aspect of that theme. This allows students to develop their own interpretations of the past, while also collaborating creatively with classmates.”

**Excerpt 4:** “Assessment is a key factor in foreign language learning, since it allows students to keep track of not only what they already know, but also of what they need to know in order to excel in the foreign language they are learning. Also, I consider that the fairest and most reliable way to assess students’ learning is using a wide range of assessment tools and techniques: from formative to summative; from quizzes, portfolios, essays, participation and class discussions to oral and written exams. Students must be exposed to a wide variety of assessment techniques so that they have the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned and show their skillfulness on every domain.”

**Excerpt 5:** “I see teaching as an opportunity to give students critical thinking skills and the ability to ask and answer their own questions (i.e. inquiry-based learning). I hope that even non-majors come away from my classroom with a better appreciation for the scientific process, and a more nuanced understanding of subjects like statistical probability and logic, which are important to being an informed citizen and parsing between legitimate and illegitimate sources of information. During lectures, I like to employ “Think, Pair, Share” so students have an opportunity to form, discuss and defend their ideas. I also cultivate critical and creative thinking by assigning labs that are based on real data and incorporate active learning exercises that I create myself or acquire from geoscience educational resources such as SERC. I have led semester-long class projects where students collect and analyze paleontological data from real fossils in the Life Through Time Lab. These labs include formative assessment with in-class feedback on short assignments and written feedback on longer assignments. For example, during the week that we discuss the depositional environment in lecture and lab, I have the students assess the depositional environment of their fossil collection. When we discuss diversity, I have them measure the diversity of their collection. This way, they are actively connecting what they learned in class to a real problem, and they are able to slowly collect data, make interpretations, and receive feedback from me each week, making their summative assessment, a final presentation and paper, much less intimidating.”

**Excerpt 6:** “Another aspect of my job teaching animal behavior is to help my students design, conduct, and present on animal behavior research projects. These projects provide another opportunity to foster active learning and independent critical thinking. As I guide my students through the scientific research process, I first allow them to attempt each stage on their own by completing a form for that step. I then provide feedback on those forms, often asking them open-ended, guided questions to highlight aspects they should be considering while still allowing them to come up with their own solutions. It is a reciprocal, collaborative process, and it also allows us to engage in another aspect of teaching that I find very important: ungraded assessments of the students’ work. I grade the project forms as completion grades, meaning that as long as the students incorporate my feedback and do their best, they will do well. This culminates in their final research presentations at the end of the semester, at which point they are graded for the quality of their projects. While I view grades as a necessary evil for evaluating student progress, I find that concern for grades can obscure actual learning, as the students are often far more concerned about their letter grade than they are about their own mastery of the material. The grading structure of these projects frees both me and my students from that constraint and allows for a trial-and-error active learning process with a final assessment grade at the finish.”