

Setting and Assessing Outcomes

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ATESL Adult ESL Curriculum Framework



Section 2: Setting and Assessing Outcomes

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Overview

In this section of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework*, we focus on guiding principles in the area of outcomes and assessment, the meaning of the term *outcome*, and the practical task of writing outcome statements. We then address assessment, both *of* learning and *as* teaching and learning (or assessment *for* learning¹), looking particularly at rubrics and portfolios. The purpose is not to list language learning outcomes or assessment procedures for different adult ESL programs,² but to explore important aspects of outcomes and assessment as they relate to ESL curriculum development.

Introduction

Outcomes and assessment are linked deliberately in the *Curriculum Framework* to highlight the need for congruence between the two. Learning outcomes are statements of intended learning which provide an intentional focus for instruction and assessment – and serve to link both back to learner needs.³



For more information on assessing learner needs, see Section 1: Determining Needs.

In the process of designing a curriculum, the curriculum developer

- Sets outcomes that reflect the needs of the learners.⁴
- Recommends, develops, or selects assessment tasks and procedures to determine whether outcomes have been met (and whether learning needs have been addressed).
- Selects and sequences content, and provides examples of tasks to meet the learning outcomes of the course (and address the needs of the learners).



This step will be addressed in the next two sections of the Curriculum Framework: Section 3: Sequencing Tasks and Section 4: Selecting Methods and Materials.

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Ongoing formative evaluation and feedback, of value to the learners, are integrated into the teaching/learning process and inform class direction.

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Appropriate summative assessment is meaningful, based on multiple measures, and clearly linked to the outcomes specified in the curriculum and to class content/activities. Learners know how they will be assessed.

¹ Holmes, 2005, p. 6

² Outcomes should be closely tied to the needs that have been identified, and these needs will vary from program to program. However, outcomes can be gleaned from a variety of documents that already exist, including CLB and ES documents.

³ The following are examples of learning outcomes:

- For reading: “Learners will be able to identify main ideas, key words, and important details in an authentic 1-2 page text.” “Learners will identify and make use of strategies for improving reading speed, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development.”
- For speaking: “Learners will use a variety of techniques (e.g., echoing a word/phrase using rising intonation, summarizing, paraphrasing) to clarify communication and check comprehension.”
“Learners will use conversation strategies (e.g., greetings, responses to compliments, small talk) to initiate and maintain conversations in informal social or business settings.”

For a more in-depth discussion of what a learning outcome is, and for additional examples of learning outcomes, see the section below titled “Learning Outcomes.”

⁴ Needs are identified by a variety of stakeholders (i.e., not only learners, but also instructors, community leaders, educational institutions, professional associations, licensing bodies, professionals practicing in the field graduates, potential and present employers, counsellors, etc.).

The diagram below (see Figure 1) illustrates the interconnections between each of these activities and the assessment which occurs later, during and after teaching/learning.

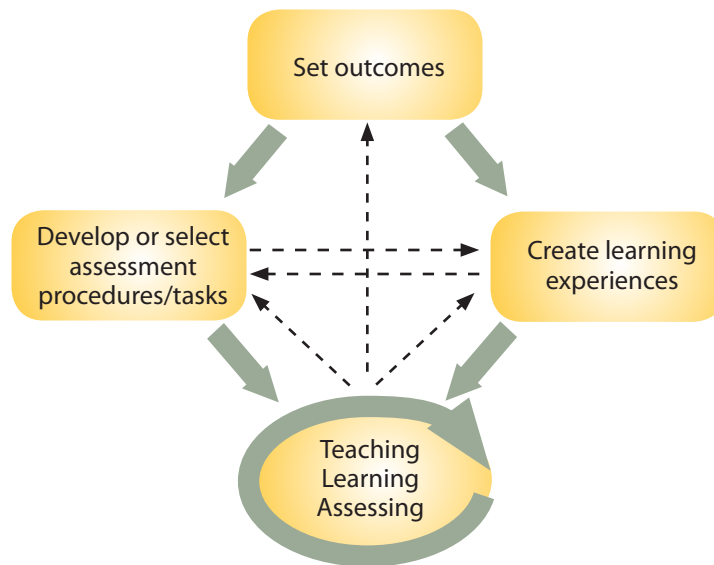


Figure 1. Connecting outcomes and assessment⁵

As the diagram indicates, learning outcomes inform assessment procedures and planned learning experiences. In turn, the planned learning experiences and assessments inform the teaching, learning, and assessing that occur throughout a course. This, however, is not a linear process.

Rather, the learning experiences that are created also inform which assessment procedures and tasks are proposed. As well, the predetermined assessment procedures can have a washback effect⁶ on the learning experiences that are planned. If the assessment procedures are congruent with the learning outcomes and learner needs, this washback effect should be positive.

Assessment that occurs during the teaching and learning process can also inform the creation of additional learning experiences, as learners receive feedback regarding what they have learned and what they still need to learn, and as instructors make ongoing choices regarding materials, tasks, sequencing, methods, focus, and direction. Assessment results may also call into question the assessment procedures and tasks that have been developed. For example, it may become clear that the assessment methods are not valid measures of the learning that has occurred in the class, and new assessment measures may need to be developed. Furthermore, assessment results may call into question the learning outcomes themselves. That is, assessment results may indicate that outcomes were not stated clearly, or were not appropriate for the needs of the particular learners or program.

⁵ This diagram is adapted from Huba & Freed (2000).

⁶ The term “washback effect” refers to the impact or influence of a test on how and what learners are taught.

Principles for setting and assessing outcomes

It is important to keep in mind the following six principles when considering outcomes and assessment.⁷

Congruent

“ *Is there a clear connection between the outcome statement(s) and the assessment task?* ”

Learning outcomes and assessment tasks need to be congruent, or connected, so that they reflect and support each other. Language learning outcomes are framed in observable and measurable terms, and assessment judges learning in relation to outcomes. Outcomes and assessment also need to be consistent with instructional practices. That is, there needs to be congruence throughout the curriculum of outcomes, teaching and learning tasks, and assessment. Learners need to be able to expect this same congruence in both ongoing (formative) and summative assessment. This kind of congruence or “fitting together” between learning outcomes, tasks, materials, and assessment is a sign of a well-designed curriculum.⁸

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Summative assessment is linked directly to the goals and outcomes specified by the curriculum. (Indicator 1)

There is a transparent connection between what is done in class and the assessment that occurs. (Indicator 3)

Valid

“ *Does the assessment task measure what I intended to measure? Has this kind of assessment task been used as part of instruction?* ”

A valid assessment task measures what it is intended to measure. For example, it is important to ensure that a listening assessment task is actually assessing listening comprehension, rather than memory, background knowledge, or writing/speaking skills. Writing demonstrable and measurable outcome statements makes it easier to ensure valid assessment. As well, it is important to examine the fit between learning tasks and assessment tasks.⁹ For example, CLB exit and milestone tests will be valid only to the extent the program’s curriculum is consistent with the objectives and the task-based approach of the Canadian Language Benchmarks.¹⁰

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The program ensures that assessment is fair and valid.

⁷ The discussion draws from Holmes, 2005, p. 5-9; Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 32-90; Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2010, p. 41-42; O’Malley & Pierce, 1996; Pearson Custom Publishing, 2004, p. 18-23.

⁸ See Roessingh’s *Learning by Design* website: <http://www.learningbydesign.ucalgary.ca/>.

⁹ O’Malley & Pierce, 1996, p. 76.

¹⁰ Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2007 & 2010, p. 5; Pawlikowska-Smith, 2004; Saint-Germain, 2009.

Comprehensive

“ Do the assessment tasks measure all of the learning outcomes covered?
Are a variety of different kinds of assessment tasks used? Is assessment ongoing? ”

This principle refers to the need for a range of learning outcomes that are assessed in multiple ways at multiple times. Thinking critically and logically, solving problems, learning to learn, demonstrating positive attitudes and behaviours, being responsible and adaptable, and working well with others – these are just some of the necessary skills in today’s community, workplace, and academic contexts that need to be considered in ESL curriculum development. Learning outcomes (which set direction and intention) and assessment tasks/procedures (which indicate whether outcomes have been met) should address a wide range of these skills. They should also address issues related to intercultural communicative competence, mindful learning, and e-learning. Being comprehensive is one way of working within the complexity of language teaching, learning, and assessment, and reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional and integrated.

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Summative evaluation is based on multiple and varied measures of assessment, appealing to different learning styles, conducted over time. (Indicator 6)



For a discussion of issues related to active learning, learner strategies, and learning styles, and for examples of learning outcomes that address mindful learning, see Section 6: Mindful Learning.

For a discussion of issues related to intercultural communicative competence (ICC), and for examples of outcomes and tasks that address ICC, see Section 7: Intercultural Communicative Competence.

For a discussion of how to integrate e-learning into a curriculum, and for suggested e-learning outcomes and tasks, see Section 8: E-learning.

It is important to note that, while the CLB 2000¹¹ is a valuable source of language learning outcomes and assessment tasks, it does not necessarily address all the competencies that would be relevant to learners in a particular program. The CLB 2000 framework addresses four competencies that are used in different contexts and are directly observable. In this sense, the framework is a valuable resource of relevant language learning outcomes and assessment tasks. As Holmes (2005) notes, however, the CLB 2000 provides “only a sampling of a person’s ability at a particular benchmark level, the ‘tip of the iceberg.’”¹² It takes a functional approach to generic community, academic, and work-related contexts. The framework, and assessment tasks based on that framework, may not reflect or capture the entirety of a learner’s necessary competence. In fact, it is important to note that the CLB 2000 framework was never intended to be taken up as a curriculum guide.¹³



For more information on the Canadian Language Benchmarks, see *Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2011*.

¹¹ Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005.

¹² Holmes, 2005, p. 11.

¹³ Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005, p. viii.

Meaningful

“ *Is the learning outcome something that is meaningful to the learners? Is it connected to a learning need? Is the assessment task measuring something that is useful to my learners? Is the assessment task itself real-world and relevant?* ”

As well as highlighting the need for congruence, ATESL (2009) points to the need for meaningful outcomes and assessment (Best Practice #54, Indicator 5). Attention should be focussed on what learners can do in language, rather than what they know about language. Assessment should reflect the real world and be relevant. Another way to make learning more meaningful is to build learner autonomy and accountability. Including outcomes for the use of self-assessment skills and language learning strategies addresses learner needs and ultimately empowers learners.

Inclusive

“ *Is the outcome-assessment process made clear to learners? Are they actively involved in the assessment process?* ”

This concept refers to the place of the learner in the outcomes and assessment process.¹⁴ Learners have a right and a need to know how they are progressing in their language learning. Learners need to know what is expected of them, how they can achieve the expectations, and whether or not they have achieved them. Assessment must be transparent; that is, outcomes and assessment are public knowledge, known and agreed upon by learners and instructors.

Going one step further, learners can be involved in determining how they will be evaluated. For instance, rubrics can be co-created by instructor and learners. As they participate in setting the criteria for success of a particular task, learners are participating in the evaluation process. In turn, this promotes learner participation, accountability, commitment, and autonomy. (See “Rubrics” below)

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Summative assessment is meaningful: There is a transparent connection between what is assessed and the present and future needs and goals of the learners. (Indicator 5)

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Self-assessment strategies are developed to give learners control of their own learning, better understanding of their own skills, and a clearer focus on goals and objectives. (Indicator 2)

No. 54

What will be assessed and criteria/expectations for success are made clear to learners prior to assessment. (Indicator 2)

¹⁴ Holmes, 2005, p. 8; Huba & Freed, 2000; Toronto Catholic District School Board, 2003, p. 62.

Reliable

“ If I set the same assessment task tomorrow using the same conditions, would the results be the same? If my teaching partner set the same assessment task tomorrow using the same conditions, would the results be the same? ”

Reliability refers to consistency of results. There are at least two kinds of reliability.¹⁵ One is *test-retest reliability*, or the measure of a learner’s consistency of performance over time. For example, if you give a group of learners a test today, you should expect basically the same results if you give the same learners the same test tomorrow, assuming they did not review the skills in the meantime. Another type of reliability is *inter-rater reliability*, or the measure of consistency among individual assessors’ ratings of a performance. Assessors marking the same oral presentation, for example, should all have very similar scores, assuming their scoring is based on the same criteria for performance (see “Rubrics” below).

The descriptive nature of qualitative assessment leads to an unavoidable tension with the notion of reliability: “Whether we are making judgments about a student’s essay or using a standardized test score to make entrance decisions, we are using interpretation.”¹⁶ However, congruent learning outcomes and assessment, a comprehensive range of outcomes, and multiple assessment strategies can improve reliability.

The sections that follow provide an overview of learning outcomes and assessment, informed by the principles discussed above.

Learning outcomes

The term outcome can be understood from a few different perspectives. In this section, the terminology related to “outcomes” will first be discussed. Then the task of writing language learning outcome statements will be addressed, along with Bloom *et al.’s* (1956, 1964) taxonomy of educational learning objectives.

The first step in the assessment process is to formulate statements of intended learning outcomes. In an outcomes- or competency-based approach,¹⁷ outcomes

- Emphasize what learners will be able to do. For example, “learners will be able to identify main ideas and factual details in articles, reports, and stories.”¹⁸
- Provide a focus for both instructor and learner.
- Provide a basis for selecting and/or designing instructional materials, tasks, and methods.
- Establish a foundation for evaluating learning.

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In-house assessment tools are reliable, valid, piloted, and revised to ensure they are measuring what they are intended to measure. (Indicator 6)

The program supports/ encourages collaboration among instructors of the same proficiency levels to ensure inter-rater reliability and validity of rating instruments. (Indicator 7)

¹⁵ Alderson, Clapham, & Wall, 1995.

¹⁶ Holmes, 2005, p. 11.

¹⁷ Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 40; Capune, 2008, p. 7; Eyring, 1998, p. 24.

¹⁸ Capune, 2008, p. 21.

When shared with learners, outcomes help ensure that everyone understands what is expected and knows when the learning has been accomplished.¹⁹ This enables the program to demonstrate greater accountability.



For more information on this, see *Section 5: Demonstrating Accountability*.

One way to conceptualize learning outcomes is to discuss them in terms of General Learning Outcomes (GLOs) and Specific Learning Outcomes (SLOs), and to illustrate them in terms of performance conditions and performance indicators, as was done in the *Alberta LINC 5 Curriculum*.²⁰

- GLOs describe what successful learners will be able to do at the end of the course. They should be written in such a way that stakeholders (i.e., employer, funder, learner, etc.) understand what is meant.
- Performance conditions describe the conditions and limitations that might need to be applied to the GLOs, based on the learner's level.
- SLOs are more classroom-focused as they describe the skills and knowledge that learners will need to develop in order to master the GLOs. They are addressed primarily to those who will teach and assess learners. There may be multiple SLOs for each GLO that is listed.
- Performance indicators describe more specifically what learners need to be able to do to successfully meet the SLOs. They provide a focus for instructors as they plan instruction, as well as provide criteria for evaluating whether or not a task has been performed successfully.

Table 1 gives definitions of GLOs, SLOs, performance conditions, and performance indicators, within the context of a LINC 5/CLB 6 listening task.²¹

¹⁹ ISWIAC, 2006, p. 23-25; Kahn, 2003.

²⁰ Capune, 2008. The document provides a good model for developing thematic curricula.

²¹ Adapted from Capune, 2008, p.7, 9-10.

Table 1. Outcomes, conditions, and indicators (LINC 5/CLB 6 listening task)

GLOs	Describe what learners will be able to do upon successful completion (of the course, unit, program, diploma, etc.)	<i>Learners will demonstrate the ability to follow spoken instructions.</i>
Performance Conditions	Describe situations and limitations that apply to the general learning objectives.	<i>Listening texts are moderately short (2 to 5 minutes) and are given on familiar everyday, workplace, or academic topics...The topic is concrete and familiar.</i>
SLOs	Describe the skills and knowledge that need to be developed by learners if they are to successfully master the general learning outcomes.	<i>Learners will be able to follow a set of instructions with 7-10 steps where the order must be inferred.</i>
Performance Indicators	Describe criteria to assess the specific learning outcome competency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Identifies sequence markers to understand steps.</i> • <i>Extracts details.</i> • <i>Checks information within a group if necessary.</i> • <i>Writes down the order using point form (80% accuracy).</i>

Writing outcome statements

In an outcomes-based approach, learning is broken down into increasingly smaller, more measurable items. The curriculum developer should begin with the needs of the learners as identified in the needs analysis. These needs can then be described in terms of **General Learning Outcomes**. For instance, if it is determined that learners in a particular program will need to fill out a variety of forms (application forms, health history forms, passport application forms), a GLO could read²²

GLO

- "Learners will be able to fill out relevant forms accurately and legibly."

Performance conditions further refine the GLO, narrowing the expectations to suit a particular level. For instance, a performance condition for the above GLO could read

Performance conditions

- Forms are less than 40 items long.

²² The GLO below comes from Capune, 2008, p. 27.

Specific learning outcomes further specify the learning, depending on the needs of the class. If the class in question is designed specifically for nurses or healthcare aides, the SLO may read

**SLO
(healthcare)**

- The learner will be able to fill out forms found in healthcare settings based on a listening text, an interview, or a case study.

If the class contains learners who are looking to join the workforce, the SLO may read

**SLO
(workplace)**

- The learner will be able to fill out workplace forms based on an interview, a listening text, a reading, or information from his/her own situation.

Sample tasks illustrate these SLOs in more detail. In the SLO related to healthcare settings, sample tasks may include

**Sample
Tasks
(healthcare)**

- Filling in an incident report based on a written report
- Filling in a requisition order based on an information gap activity
- Filling in a bath record based on a recorded conversation
- Filling in a medication administration record based on a recorded phone call

In the SLO related to the workplace, sample tasks may include

**Sample
Tasks
(workplace)**

- Filling out an injury report based on information in a recorded conversation
- Completing a job application form using information from student's own life
- Completing a requisition form using information from a recorded phone call
- Completing a medical history form for a character in a story or case study

Performance indicators refine these outcomes and tasks even more by listing the learning points that an instructor may choose to focus on to enable a learner to successfully complete the task. For the SLOs mentioned above, some of the performance indicators could include

**Performance
Indicators**

- Distinguishes relevant from irrelevant information
- Accurately reports information
- Fills in all necessary parts of the form
- Lists items in point form
- Checks off relevant information
- Spells and punctuates correctly
- Understands and uses appropriate abbreviations
- Writes legibly

Note that administrators and curriculum designers are more likely to state broader goals and general learning outcomes.²³ Instructors, on the other hand, rely more on specific learning outcomes, sample tasks, and performance indicators for classroom planning and assessment.

The following table, with information adapted from the LINC 5 curriculum, illustrates again how learning is broken down into increasingly smaller and more measurable items, this time in reference to a writing goal.²⁴

Table 2. Sample outcomes for writing business correspondence (Reprinted with permission)

GLO: Learners will be able to convey personal and business messages through notes and letters.


SLO: Learners will be able to convey requests and invitations in short emails and letters.

Performance condition: Letters are generally one or two paragraphs long.

Sample Tasks	Performance Indicators
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write an email inviting a friend to go to a movie and include directions to the movie theatre. 2. Write a short letter requesting a recommendation letter from a former employer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates the appropriate level of formality • Clearly states the purpose of the message • Includes all necessary details • Demonstrates correct simple structures, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation with few errors • Uses correct email format • Demonstrates “netiquette” rules in email

Canadian Language Benchmarks

The CLB 2000 framework²⁵ is a useful source of outcomes, performance conditions and performance indicators for learners at specific benchmark levels. At each benchmark level, each skill is described in terms of Global Performance Indicators, Performance Conditions, and a table including what the person can do (in terms of social interaction, instructions, suasion, and information), examples of tasks/texts, and performance indicators. The Global Performance Indicators and the column entitled “What the person can do” are useful for articulating general and specific learning outcomes. Canadian Language Benchmark “Can Do” statements from the target level can also be helpful.²⁶ Holmes (2005) provides practical visuals showing how various performance descriptors, conditions, and indicators from the CLB 2000 framework support different learning tasks.



For more information on the Canadian Language Benchmarks, see *Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2011*.

²³ Eyring, 1998, p. 32.

²⁴ The GLO, performance condition, sample tasks and performance indicators are reprinted with permission from Capune, 2008, p. 27 and 30.

²⁵ Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005.

²⁶ Capune, personal communication, December 10, 2010; Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, n.d.

Essential Skills

Two other very useful resources when writing outcome statements are the Essential Skills Profiles (ESP) and *Relating Canadian Language Benchmarks to Essential Skills: A Comparative Framework*.²⁷ As mentioned in *Determining Needs* and *Sequencing Tasks*, the ESP are a rich source of workplace tasks, and these tasks can often be a starting place for articulating outcome statements that are related to the workplace language learning needs of learners.

The *Comparative Framework* relates the proficiency levels described by the CLB to the task complexity of the Essential Skills.²⁸ Global descriptions of the CLB proficiency levels for each skill are compared side-by-side with global descriptions of Essential Skills²⁹ at the applicable complexity levels. These lists, along with comparative lists of CLB and ES tasks at similar levels, can be a useful reference when writing outcome statements for courses that are linked to the CLB.

Table 3 illustrates how outcome statements can flow naturally from the tasks described in an ESP.

Table 3. Outcomes drawn from an Essential Skills Profile

Workplace Task: Greet customers, take their orders and suggest drinks³⁰
(ES oral communication level 1, CLB speaking 5-6, CLB Listening 5-7).

GLO When the course is finished, the learners will demonstrate the ability to greet customers, take their orders and suggest drinks.

SLOs Learners will be able to greet customers, and respond to small talk.
Learners will be able to clarify instructions.
Learners will be able to initiate taking an order and make suggestions.

Performance Conditions Interaction is face-to-face, context is clear and predictable, topic is concrete and familiar.

Performance Indicators

- Uses appropriate expressions
- Provides appropriate information
- Offers to take an order
- Uses appropriate expressions for making suggestions
- Clarifies information using echoing, paraphrasing, summarizing, and questioning
- Indicates understanding through verbal and non-verbal communication


²⁷ Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2005.

²⁸ It is important to note that the *Comparative Framework* does not provide a direct correlation between ES and CLB descriptors. It does, however, provide an idea of how both scales intersect.

²⁹ Specifically, oral communication, reading, writing, and document use.

³⁰ This task is taken from the Essential Skills Profile for Bartenders, NOC 6452. Retrieved from <http://www10.hrsdc.gc.ca/es/english/ShowProfile.aspx?v=36>

If the learners are a homogeneous group (i.e., all working in the hospitality/restaurant industry), then the GLOs and SLOs would reflect that context, for instance, by mentioning “greet customers, take their orders and suggest drinks.” If the class is less homogeneous, the GLOs and SLOs may be written in more general terms so that they can be applied to a variety of contexts. One of the suggested tasks in such a class, however, may be to take orders and suggest drinks, as the skills required for that task (i.e., meeting and greeting people, responding to small talk, listening to instructions, and giving information and suggestions) are transferrable to a wide variety of contexts.



For more information on the Essential Skills Profiles, see the *Essential Skills Profiles* on the HRSDC website.

For more information on relating the CLB to the ES, see the *Comparative Framework* at ITSESENTIAL.ca.

Bloom’s Taxonomy

When writing outcomes, tasks, and performance indicators, it is important to use verbs that clearly indicate how the learner will demonstrate what s/he has learned. Words that describe observable behaviours, such as *write*, *recite*, *list*, and *compare*, are better than words which are more open to interpretation and less easily measured, such as *know*, *understand*, *grasp*, and *believe*.³¹ For example, “The learner can read and understand a story” is too vague. What do learners need to do to demonstrate their understanding? In this case, “The learner will identify the main idea and some details” is a more precise and demonstrable outcome.³² This distinction between what can and cannot be observed is important when it comes to assessment: the more observable an outcome statement is, the more easily it can be assessed.

Bloom *et al.*'s (1956, 1964) taxonomy of educational learning outcomes is helpful for writing a range of outcome statements.³³ There are three domains in the taxonomy: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. We focus here primarily on the cognitive domain.

In Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy, the cognitive domain considers the *kind* of understanding required in a specific context and establishes six “thinking” skills. It goes beyond an understanding of thinking as knowledge, or simply remembering, and confirming (“lower-order” thinking skills), to include the following “higher-order” skills: applying information to other contexts; analyzing the features of a given phenomenon; synthesizing information to create something new; and evaluating information. Note that recent work suggests that synthesis, rather than evaluation, is the highest-order thinking skill.³⁴ The outcome writing and assessing processes are simpler for lower-order objectives than for critical thinking objectives.³⁵ However, ESL learners need to be involved in language learning tasks that ask them to go beyond gathering and using information to using their critical and creative (i.e., higher-order) thinking skills. It is important to move away from forms of assessment that involve lower-order thinking only.

The following table provides a list of external performance verbs tied to Bloom’s hierarchy of cognitive skills (see *Table 4*). These verbs are useful in writing demonstrable, measurable outcome statements and performance indicators.

³¹ Eyring, 1998, p. 26.

³² Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 40.

³³ See Pearson Custom Publishing, 2004, p. 141-143, for an interesting discussion of other ways to expand scope.

³⁴ Pohl, 2000.

³⁵ ISWIAC, 2006, p. 23.

Table 4. External performance verbs tied to Bloom’s hierarchy of cognitive skills³⁶

Cognitive Skills	External Performance Verbs
Knowledge (gathering and recalling information)	Define, list, state, match, identify, outline, arrange, name, locate, select...
Comprehension (understanding)	Explain, interpret, classify, discuss, describe, report, paraphrase, infer, summarize, give examples...
Application (making use of knowledge)	Use, apply, operate, employ, illustrate, produce, construct, role-play, predict...
Analysis (taking apart)	Analyze, distinguish, appraise, debate, compare, contrast, examine, investigate...
Synthesis (putting together; creating)	Develop, create, manage, design, organize, generate, plan, construct, formulate, revise...
Evaluation (judging)	Judge, evaluate, review, criticize, assess, justify...



For specific guidance regarding setting learning outcomes for ESL literacy classes, see *Stage 3: Set Learning Outcomes* in *Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework*.

³⁶ Compiled from Bloom *et al.*, 1956; Chapman, 2006; ISWIAC, 2006; Kahn, 2003.

Assessment

“ Assessment always has more to do with helping students grow than with cataloguing their mistakes.³⁷ ”

Writing good learning outcome statements is the first step in the assessment process and is closely linked with the second step: developing or selecting assessment measures. There are many ways to assess language learning. Performance assessment includes traditional paper-and-pencil tests and less traditional measures, such as projects (see *Section 3: Sequencing Tasks*) and portfolios (see below). This section addresses ongoing, formative, classroom-based performance assessment in relation to learning outcomes. The discussion looks first at assessment as teaching and learning, then at rubrics and portfolios.

Assessment as teaching and learning

Well-designed and appropriately used assessment procedures can contribute to more effective instruction and greater English language learning. This has been described as assessment for learning, rather than of learning,³⁸ or in other words, assessment as teaching and learning. It suits an understanding of language as complex, far more than just a product or tool for communication, often non-predictable, and not always easily measured or quantified.³⁹

Approaching assessment from both perspectives (i.e., assessment both for and of learning) will support strong connections between outcomes, tasks, materials, and assessment. In the previous section we addressed the importance of developing clearly stated outcomes. Those clearly stated outcomes are embodied in the classroom in the form of tasks and activities. Both during and after instruction, learning and performance are continually assessed. This assessment of learning provides feedback to learners regarding where they are and whether or not they are able to meet the outcomes of the class. Instructors are not the only ones providing feedback on learning – learners can assess their own learning as well as provide feedback to peers. Assessment, then, should reflect what is taught in a class, and be linked clearly to the learning outcomes of the class. For instance, if your class is tied to the Canadian Language Benchmarks, your assessment should reflect that connection.⁴⁰

Rubrics and portfolios are methods of assessment that are connected transparently to the outcomes of the class and engage learners in the assessment process.

Rubrics

A rubric describes different types of criteria for success on a particular task and defines what learners are expected to demonstrate to be successful.⁴¹ It lists the criteria for successfully completing a piece of work and articulates levels of quality for the criteria (e.g., from excellent to limited).⁴² Essentially, a rubric reveals the scoring “rules.”⁴³

³⁷ Tomlinson, 1999, cited in Pearson Custom Publishing, 2004, p. A 3-4.

³⁸ Holmes, 2005.

³⁹ Holmes, 2005, p. 11; Holmes, Kingwell, Pettis, & Pidlaski, 2001, p. 72; Pappamihel & Walser, 2009; Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005.

⁴⁰ The following resources include CLB-based in-class assessments:

- *CLB 5-10 Exit Assessment Tasks* (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2007)
- *Integrating CLB Assessment into your ESL Classroom* (Holmes, 2005)
- *Literacy Placement Tool, Volumes 1 & 2* (Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2005/2006)
- *On Target* (Mittra, 1998)

⁴¹ Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 183; Holmes, 2005, p. 75, 76, 91-92; Kuhs, Johnson, Agruso, & Monrad, 2001; Shohamy & Inbar, 2006.

⁴² Goodrich, 1996, cited in Pearson Custom Publishing, 2004, p. A 3-43.

⁴³ Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 155.

Why use rubrics?

Rubrics are a powerful tool for learning. They help learners know what they need to do to meet or exceed the learning outcomes. As they come to understand the characteristics of excellent work, they become increasingly sophisticated learners and assessors.⁴⁴ Rubrics help learners build an understanding of the assessment process and become thoughtful judges of their own and others' work.⁴⁵ Learners can use rubrics to create goals, organize their work (e.g., for a portfolio), keep track of their learning, and identify areas for further work.

Rubrics are also powerful tools for teaching and assessment. They reinforce the connection between performance outcomes and assessment, thereby resulting in valid, more reliable assessment tasks, and they provide a focus for instruction. Rubrics can also show if learners understand what they are learning and are sufficiently challenged.⁴⁶ They help instructors recognize and respond to performance differences, and they can reduce the time that instructors spend evaluating learners' work. They can also be used by programs and curriculum designers to determine if program goals and learning outcomes have been achieved. Rubrics are easy to use and explain, and they improve consistency in scoring.⁴⁷

Sample rubrics

Rubrics can be used as both assessment for learning and assessment of learning. They can be used by learners, peers, and instructors.

For instance, imagine that an SLO for a course reads "Learners will be able to present and respond to opinions and recommendations in formal group settings (e.g., committee meetings, department meetings, community meetings, etc.)." The instructor then designs a task in which learners take on specific roles and participate in a committee meeting in which they must make decisions about a matter of public interest.⁴⁸ After learners have done the necessary preparation for the committee meeting (but before the simulation), they are asked what a successful participant on the committee might do. Together with the instructor, the learners collaboratively create a rubric which would measure the success of the task. This class-created rubric can be left on the board during the simulation, and after the simulation, learners can provide each other with feedback based on that rubric. Or the instructor could supply learners with a previously created rubric such as the following:

⁴⁴ Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 48-52.

⁴⁵ Other self-assessment strategies are provided in e.g., Holmes, Kingwell, Pettis, & Pidlaski, 2001, p. 155-156; Huba & Freed, 2000.

⁴⁶ Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 183.

⁴⁷ Guskey, 1999, cited in Pearson Custom Publishing, 2004, p. A 3-43.

⁴⁸ For instance, learners could take on the roles of different stakeholders in a community as they weigh in on an issue that is being debated in the media or in an institution (e.g., whether and how to deal with late night noise and disruption in a particular neighborhood; whether and how to enforce a particular policy in a particular work site; etc.)

Table 5. Sample rubric for learning

Participating on a Committee			
Name: _____	Wow!	Just fine 😊	Work on it!
Expresses and supports opinions. Effectively contributes to the conversation. Shows understanding of topic.			
Gets turns (uses verbal and non-verbal cues to show s/he wants to speak).			
Shows listenership (gives verbal and non-verbal feedback). Recognizes cues that others want to speak (does not dominate).			
Responds to what others say with comprehension checks, comments, expressions of agreement and disagreement, requests for clarification.			
Is easy to understand.			
Uses some focus vocabulary related to the topic (from readings).			
Uses some functional vocabulary related to expressing agreement and disagreement, making recommendations, etc. (see handout)			
Suggestions for improvement:			

Ways of accomplishing each of the criteria on the rubric would be discussed (e.g., What kinds of cues would show that a person has something to say?). Examples of performance which both meet and do not meet the criteria can be modeled. Then groups of learners participate in the committee meeting. After the meeting, learners either complete the rubric as a self-assessment, or give each other feedback based on the rubric. This is assessment *for* learning, as learners are encouraged to identify strengths, weaknesses, and gaps, prior to participating in a similar activity.

After learners have participated in a number of such simulations, the instructor could use the rubric below to assess their learning (see *Table 6*). The rubric below is designed for an instructor to use with five learners participating in a simulated committee meeting. It can serve as an assessment *of* learning, as well as (if students have the opportunity to participate again in a similar activity) an assessment *for* learning.

Table 6. Sample rubric of learning

Rubric for Committee Meeting. Each item below is rated on a scale of 1-5.					
<i>5=Excellent; 4=Good; 3=Okay, but needs to improve; 2=Partially demonstrated; 0-1=Not enough to evaluate</i>					
Names	Content: Expresses opinions; Contributes to discussion; Demonstrates understanding of topic.	Turntaking & listenership: Gets turns; Recognizes cues and gives others turns; Shows listenership.	Responses: Responds to others' ideas (agrees, disagrees, expands) Checks comprehension; Requests clarification	Clarity: Speech is clear and easy to understand; Pronunciation (linking, sounds) and grammar	Vocabulary: Uses topic-specific vocabulary; Uses functional vocabulary for expressing agreement, disagreement, etc.
Yuan					
Natalia					
Maria					
Jacob					
Andjez					

Importantly, rubrics give learners and instructors the opportunity to talk about learning. As language proficiency progresses, the explanation and analysis of rubrics with learners can become more detailed and subtle. Presenting samples along with the rubrics can also give meaning to the descriptors. Zwiers (2008) points out that proper use of a rubric to self- and peer-assess takes a good deal of explicit modeling with both good and intentionally flawed samples. He writes “Students need a clear idea of what they are to do and not do, what the product looks and sounds like, and how to evaluate each feature that goes into the rubric.”⁴⁹ Rubrics support the development of metacognitive skills and help learners understand and speak the language of assessment. They support meaningful and inclusive teaching, learning, and assessment practices.

Rubrics can include holistic and/or analytic criteria. Holistic criteria refer to overall or global communicative effectiveness. That is, can learners perform the task? Do they appropriately carry out all the elements of the task and accomplish the task’s intended purpose? The first criterion in the above rubric (Table 6) is somewhat holistic. Analytic criteria are more specific and relate to the quality or correctness of the product or performance. They describe the different levels for each of the task’s criteria.⁵⁰ In speaking, assessors might rate fluency, appropriateness, intelligibility/ pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. In writing, analytic criteria might include grammatical structures, vocabulary

⁴⁹ p. 237.

⁵⁰ McNamara, 2000, p. 43-44. Also see Holmes, 2005, p. 65-66, 107, 129, 211-212.

use and range, and mechanical features.⁵¹ The last four criteria in the above rubric (Table 6) are more analytic.

Table 7 below is a more formal rubric for a descriptive paragraph writing task that includes both holistic and analytic criteria. This rubric was developed for a group of visiting English teachers in an English for Professional Purposes course. They were given two photographs, one of a classroom and one of a wall display of student work. Their task was to write a paragraph describing the classroom (organization, seating plan, wall displays), and explain why their own learners might like this classroom. In this rubric, the levels of quality for each criteria are more specifically articulated than in the previous rubrics. Prior to using this rubric, it would be important to present learners either with this rubric, or with a simplified version (perhaps only including the holistic criteria in the form of a checklist, which they could use for self- or peer-assessment). This would help learners understand the expectations of the assignment. It would also help them identify future learning goals and encourage them to actively judge their own work.

Table 7. Writing rubric for a descriptive paragraph (Reprinted with permission)⁵²

1. Holistic scoring

- The writer organizes the text in paragraph format.
- The writer addresses each element of the task, including organization of the classroom, the seating plan, wall displays and why students might like the classroom.
- The writing demonstrates organization and a logical flow of ideas: it is cohesive and coherent.
- The writing conveys a professional register and tone.
- The writing is clear and understandable to the reader on first reading.

Were the holistic scoring criteria met? (Check ✓ one only)

<input type="checkbox"/> Incomplete/ Very limited	<input type="checkbox"/> Marginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Satisfactory/Adequate	<input type="checkbox"/> Good
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2. Analytic scoring

Organization & content	Main ideas are not always clear. Limited or no supporting details. Text is not organized or sequenced. Frequent difficulty with logical connectors.	Main ideas are stated and some supporting details are provided. Text is generally organized, but lacks logical sequencing. Some difficulty with logical connectors.	Main ideas are stated and adequately supported. Text is loosely organized. Evidence of sequencing. Adequate control of logical connectors.	Main ideas are clearly stated and supported. Text is organized and logically sequenced. Good control of logical connectors.
	Vocabulary	Limited range of vocabulary. Difficulty with word/ idiom choice and usage. Frequent errors in word form.	Some range of vocabulary. Occasional difficulty with word/ idiom choice and usage. Occasional errors in word form. Meaning may be obscured.	Satisfactory range of vocabulary. Satisfactory word/idiom choice and usage. Minor errors in word forms. Meaning is understood.

⁵¹ Holmes, 2005, p. 44-46.

⁵² University of Calgary, EPP, 2006.

Language Use	Frequent difficulty with complex structures. Limited control of agreement, tense, word order, and use of prepositions, articles and pronouns.	Occasional difficulty with complex structures. Several errors of agreement, tense, word order, and use of prepositions, articles and pronouns. Meaning may be obscured.	Satisfactory control of complex structures. Few errors of agreement, tense, word order, and use of prepositions, articles, and pronouns. Meaning is understood.	Effective control of complex structures. Minor errors of subject-verb agreement, verb tense, word order, and use of prepositions, articles, and pronouns.
Mechanics	Limited control of writing conventions. Frequent errors of spelling, punctuation and capitalization.	Some control of writing conventions. Several errors of spelling, punctuation and capitalization.	Satisfactory control of writing conventions. Occasional errors of spelling, punctuation and capitalization.	Good control of writing conventions. Minor errors of spelling, punctuation and capitalization.
	Score 1	Score 2	Score 3	Score 4

Rubrics which combine both holistic and analytic criteria can be used to determine whether a learner is meeting the requirements of a particular Canadian Language Benchmark level. The following sample includes a CLB 6 speaking task and a rubric for evaluating the task (see *Table 8*).⁵³

Table 8. CLB 6 Speaking rubric (Reprinted with permission)⁵⁴

TASK (CLB 6 SPEAKING)	
Assessment setting	Quiet room with a couple of seats around a table
Equipment	Digital recorder
Length of sample	1 1/2 minutes – 2 minutes
Instructions for assessor:	
Pre-Recording	
1. Get the learner settled.	
2. Explain that the learner will be telling the assessor how to do a familiar computer task.	
3. Do some warm-up instructions with the learner (e.g., how to make a Word document).	
Recording:	
• Set up the microphone for the speaker.	
• Give the topic page to the speaker.	
• When the preparation time is up, the assessor may say, “You may begin giving instructions now.”	
• The learner speaks at her/his own pace uninterrupted unless significant hesitation or another communication problem warrants another prompt or assistance to keep the description going.	
Instructions for learner:	
Describe how to make and send an email message. Include as many action steps as possible. You have 2 minutes to prepare. Speak for 1 1/2 - 2 minutes.	

⁵³ Notice that the above rubric moves from low to high (left to right), while the following rubric moves from high to low. There is no one right method, but it is important to alert learners to these types of differences in the rubrics they receive and use. Also, curriculum developers and instructors may want to be consistent in the rubrics they present to learners to avoid confusion.

⁵⁴ Norquest College, 2008.

RUBRIC			
Instructions: CLB 6		Learner:	
Did the learner give a set of instructions dealing with a simple daily routine presented with more than a point-form sequence of single clauses? (how to create and send an email message)			
← YES		NO →	
completely (4)	could improve (3)	must improve (2)	incompletely (1)
Content/Vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • directly states topic • provides all necessary steps in sequence with explanatory details • uses specialized vocabulary 	Content/Vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deals directly with topic but doesn't state it • provides almost all necessary steps in sequence with a few explanatory details • uses some specialized vocabulary 	Content/Vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deals mostly with topic • provides several necessary steps in sequence • uses little specialized vocabulary 	Content/Vocabulary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • takes tangents from the task • provides a few steps in sequence • uses no specialized vocabulary
Conversation Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides all required content succinctly and without prompting within 1 1/2 - 2 minutes 	Conversation Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides all required content without prompting • over 2 1/2 minutes 	Conversation Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides all required content with prompting • under 1 minute 	Conversation Management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • depends on interlocutor's cues or questions to keep the instructions moving along
Fluency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • normal speech • variety of structures including informal reductions • fluent chunking within sentences 	Fluency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • normal speech • variety of structures, few reductions • reasonably fluent within sentences with longer hesitations 	Fluency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slow to normal speech • repeated structures, lacking reductions • irregular or longer than normal hesitations 	Fluency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • slow speech • repeated structures, lacking reductions • lack of appropriate pauses and longer than normal hesitations
Intelligibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensible 	Intelligibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensible in context 	Intelligibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comprehensible with difficulty 	Intelligibility: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • largely incomprehensible
Grammar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conventional use of imperatives • some control of modals • no errors in plurals, verb tense/aspect, SV agreement, prepositions, syntax 	Grammar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-2 errors in imperatives • 1-2 errors in modals • 1-2 errors in plurals, verb tense/aspect, SV agreement, prepositions, syntax 	Grammar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3+ errors in imperatives • 3+ errors in modals • 3+ errors in plurals, verb tense/aspect, SV agreement, prepositions, syntax 	Grammar: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • poor

There are hundreds of rubrics that can be adapted to suit different purposes (although their reliability, validity, etc., will need to be determined). For example,

- Manitoba Labour & Immigration (2006) provides useful rubrics for CLB levels 1-8 writing assessment tasks, as well as the protocol for using the rubrics and detailed explanations of the holistic and analytic criteria.
- Manitoba Labour & Immigration (2009c) provides reading assessment task rubrics for CLB levels 1-8, including guidelines for selecting a reading text and question design.
- Bow Valley College (2009) offers an instructor’s assessment of individual group work skills.⁵⁵
- For those working with CLB level 5-10 (or similar) learners (e.g., ELT programs, academic contexts), the *Canadian Language Benchmarks 5-10 Exit Assessment Tasks* manual is very helpful in the area of rubric design, and explains in more detail the decision tree approach to interpreting holistic and analytic criteria.⁵⁶

Creating a rubric

The initial steps in creating a rubric are as follows:

1. Select a task to evaluate that addresses one or more of the outcomes for the class or course. If you are designing a CLB-based assessment,⁵⁷ select a benchmark task (“what the person can do”) that suits your learners’ level and the purpose of your program. Consider the CLB performance conditions for that level to determine the appropriate length, context, and difficulty of the task.
2. As you examine the task criteria, the learner outcomes, and the performance conditions, consider the essential elements that must be present in the learner’s work to ensure that it is of high quality. These elements could form the holistic assessment criteria of your task.
3. Identify the analytic criteria that most clearly and accurately determine successful performance of an outcome. If specified in the curriculum, the performance indicators for an SLO or a task can inform the criteria to include in a rubric.⁵⁸ Learners can also be invited into the process of determining which criteria to include. Where possible, rubrics should highlight what learners *can do* rather than what they *cannot do*.⁵⁹ Rubrics for lower proficiency levels will have fewer performance indicators, or analytic criteria. These criteria should be included as rows in your rubric.
4. Decide the range and number of levels that will be used to evaluate the performance or product (e.g., Likert scale). Three to five levels of achievement are common. Include these as columns in your rubric and label them (e.g., excellent, acceptable, and unacceptable; successful performance, successful but could improve, needs improvement, not successful)
5. For more formal rubrics, describe what each criterion might look like at each level of performance (e.g., no spelling mistakes, 1-3 spelling mistakes, 4-6 spelling mistakes, many spelling mistakes). Avoid undefined terms (e.g., “The work shows considerable thought”) and value-laden terms (e.g., “The work is poor”). Be specific and aim for objective descriptions of the characteristics of the work. For formal rubrics, ensure that each level of the rubric

⁵⁵ p. 186-187.

⁵⁶ Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2007. For an explanation of the decision tree approach, see p. 45-46.

⁵⁷ The following two guides for creating CLB assessments are available at www.language.ca:

- *A Guide for Trades & Professional Organizations: Developing an Occupation-Specific Language Assessment Tool Using the Canadian Language Benchmarks*
- *Integrating CLB Assessment into your ESL Classroom* (Holmes, 2005)

⁵⁸ Performance indicators are also listed for the tasks in *Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000* (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2005).

⁵⁹ CLB *Can do* posters are helpful. See Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks, n.d.

- Specifies what learners are expected to know and do.
- Addresses the same criteria using the same number of descriptors.
- Conveys the quality of learning at each level.
- Clearly distinguishes one level of performance from all others on the continuum.⁶⁰

Portfolios

Like a rubric, a portfolio is an assessment measure that promotes and supports teaching and learning; in other words, portfolio assessment is assessment for learning. Like rubrics, portfolios should reflect the outcomes of the course, as well as the teaching and learning that has occurred during the class. Once considered “alternative,” portfolio assessment has received considerable attention in the literature,⁶¹ and paper-based⁶² learner portfolios are now being used to support the assessment process in a number of adult ESL programs, including LINC levels 1-4.⁶³

Manitoba Labour & Immigration, Adult Language Training Branch, a leader in the area of collaborative language portfolio assessment (CLPA), provides a number of portfolio-related resources on its website.⁶⁴ The Portfolio Contents Checklist (Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2009b), as the title implies, includes a checklist of what should be incorporated into a language portfolio, including personal data, as well as listening, speaking, reading and writing samples which reflect the CLB outcomes categories, as well as Essential Skills categories. The Best Practice Guide (Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2009a) discusses practical issues related to introducing, storing, and using portfolios. In particular, it provides suggestions for incorporating collaborative language portfolio assessment in different ESL contexts, including CLB stages 1-2, EAP programs, ESP programs, and programs focusing on particular skills. An emphasis, in both the FAQs page⁶⁵ as well as the Best Practices guide,⁶⁶ is the importance of both instructor and learner involvement in selecting, using, and discussing items that go into the portfolio.

Types of portfolios

There are three main categories of learner portfolios:⁶⁷

- **Showcase** portfolios represent a learner’s best work. In this kind of portfolio, there is less attention to the learning process and more to showing achievement. Showcase portfolios can be valuable for finding employment. They are similar to Manitoba Labour & Immigration’s (2010) presentation portfolio.⁶⁸
- **Collections** portfolios are product- and process-oriented. They contain all of a learner’s work that shows how s/he dealt with class assignments (e.g., rough drafts, works-in-progress, final products). They can become unwieldy if they are not carefully planned or organized with a specific focus. A collections portfolio is comparable to Bow Valley College’s (2009) working portfolio⁶⁹ and to what others have called a progress portfolio.⁷⁰

⁶⁰ Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 178-184; Pearson Custom Publishing, 2004, A 3-17 - A3-18.

⁶¹ Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 233-268; O’Malley & Pierce, 1996, p. 33-56.

⁶² E-portfolios would now be considered more alternative than paper-based portfolios.

⁶³ See Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 188-192.

⁶⁴ http://www2.immigratemanitoba.com/browse/eal_teachers/eal-teachers-curriculum.html

⁶⁵ Manitoba Labour & Immigration, n.d.

⁶⁶ Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2009a

⁶⁷ O’Malley & Pierce, 1996, p. 37.

⁶⁸ p. 48. Also see Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 189.

⁶⁹ p. 188.

⁷⁰ Bailey, 1998, p. 218.

- **Assessment** portfolios are focused reflections of specific learning goals and outcomes, and contain a systematic collection of a learner’s work, self-assessment, and teacher assessment. Each entry is selected by both the learner and instructor and evaluated based on criteria also set by both. The portfolio itself does not receive a grade or rating, but the different entries may be weighted to reflect the overall level of the learner’s achievement. An assessment portfolio is like Manitoba’s (2010) collaborative learning portfolio.⁷¹

Why use portfolios?

Portfolios provide a multidimensional perspective on learners over time. They can contain samples of learners’ actual work, allow for comparisons of work in different areas and at different times, and include a variety of types of assessment, including self-assessment. As Saint-Germain (2009) points out, “Unlike a language test, a portfolio takes a broad, cumulative approach to assessment, enabling measurement of a student’s increasing grasp of non-language content (e.g., Essential Skills, Canadian civics and values, job search skills, etc.).”⁷² Portfolios provide an array of clear evidence of learning that everyone can appreciate, including learners.⁷³

Portfolios also encourage the active participation of learners in the teaching-learning-assessing process. For example, learners select entries and maintain the portfolio. They have the opportunity to reflect, analyze, evaluate, and set goals.⁷⁴ As Burke (2005) notes, “a portfolio without reflections is really just a notebook of stuff. The power of the portfolio is derived from the descriptions, reactions, processing pieces, and meta-cognitive reflections that help learners achieve their goals.”⁷⁵ As they maintain their portfolios, learners become more responsible for their own learning, which is a key step in becoming independent second language learners. Ideally, learners “own” their portfolios.



For more information on helping learners become more responsible for their learning, see *Section 6: Mindful Learning*.

A portfolio assessment strategy can also contribute to a standard curriculum, support the professional development of teachers, and facilitate the promotion of learners from one level to the next. In the case of LINC programs, portfolios are being used in levels 1-4 to assess progress toward completion of Stage 1 (basic ESL proficiency) and readiness for post-secondary study, higher-level bridge training, employment, and/or professional certification.⁷⁶

Portfolios do require a certain amount of time and likely would not be suitable in a weekly-intake program.⁷⁷ However, when incorporated into curriculum and classroom practice, portfolio assessment can become an integral part of the teaching/learning process.

⁷¹ p. 48.

⁷² Saint-Germain, 2009, p. 5.

⁷³ Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2009a, p. 47.

⁷⁴ See Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 193-195 for sample self-reflection prompt.

⁷⁵ Cited in Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 192.

⁷⁶ Saint-Germain, 2009.

⁷⁷ Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 192.

Effective portfolios

Regardless of type, an effective portfolio is a planned and organized collection of a learner's work. Entries are intentionally selected, dated, and related. A table of contents can help organize the portfolio and give the learner a reference point for sharing. Attention should be paid to the format and appearance of the portfolio.

Portfolios can be organized in a number of ways, and can include a number of different items.⁷⁸ The following is a list of potential sections or categories that might be found in a portfolio, depending on the purposes of the course:

1. An introductory section. This can include a contents checklist, an overview of the contents of the portfolio, or a reflective essay.
2. Personal section. This can include anything related to a learner's individual achievements and interests in English.
3. Sections for the skill areas that are addressed in the course (e.g., reading, writing, listening, speaking). This can include anything that demonstrates improvement or showcases the meeting of an objective in the skill area.
4. Sections for Essential Skills (e.g., computer use, numeracy, group work).
5. Sections that are organized according to the curriculum outcomes, along with the criteria used to judge that work.⁷⁹
6. An assessment section including self, peer, and instructor evaluations of various types.

The idea of a portfolio is to present a "holistic snapshot" of different aspects of a learner's academic and personal lives in order to form a "whole" picture of who they are.⁸⁰ It can tell a story about a variety of learner outcomes that would otherwise be difficult to document. It can also serve as a guide for future learning by illustrating a learner's present level of achievement. Learners should include items in their portfolio which demonstrate improvement or achievement. To show improvement, for instance, learners could include items from the beginning of the course alongside items from the end of the course (e.g., their first and last pieces of writing). To showcase work and demonstrate achievement, learners can include items that they are particularly proud of, or items that indicate they have met a particular outcome. Some items in a portfolio can be required and others can be optional.⁸¹ The following are just some of the items that could be included in a portfolio:

- Sample writings: rough drafts of written work, final drafts, timed writings, journal writings, creative writings, academic writings, reports, business letters, etc.
- Reading and listening assessments
- A timed reading chart demonstrating improvement
- Spelling and vocabulary quizzes
- Feedback from instructor and peers in the form of completed rubrics
- PowerPoint presentation handouts

⁷⁸ See Bailey, 1998; Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2009a; and Bow Valley College, 2009, for three different approaches to organizing the content of a portfolio.

⁷⁹ Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 190-191; Pearson Custom Publishing, 2004, p. A 1-17.

⁸⁰ Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 191.

⁸¹ O'Malley & Pierce, 1996, p. 47.

- Photographs
- Self-reflections
- A résumé
- Test/quiz/homework scores

E-portfolios, or digital collections of learner work, can also be considered. Along with the more traditional items listed above, these “electronic filing cabinet[s] for learner work”⁸² can also include multimedia products (e.g., podcasts, presentations), audio and video recordings of class work (e.g., group work, interviews, simulations, role-plays), and interactive feedback.⁸³



For more information on assessment strategies that incorporate educational technologies, see Section 8: E-learning.

When incorporating portfolios into your course, the following can help the process run smoothly:

- Start the portfolio process slowly.
- Highlight quality, not quantity (even with collections portfolios).
- Schedule (weekly) class time for portfolio work.
- Have learners reflect on these questions: Why was this entry selected? What was done to accomplish it? What was learned from it? What changes would improve it?
- Make time to talk with learners regularly about their portfolios. For example, to help learners think critically about how to meet academic objectives, ask what outcome(s) an item meets. This keeps everyone on the same page, builds reflective skills, and helps ensure a better process and product.
- Build in opportunities for sharing with peers and others, for example, through portfolio sharing events.⁸⁴

Evaluating portfolios

Instructor-learner conferences are one of the most valuable aspects of portfolio assessment. Prior to the conference, it is helpful to give learners the questions that will be addressed, such as “How has your English improved since the last session?” and “What can you do now that you couldn’t do before?”⁸⁵ As well, consider asking learners to present their work, using prompts such as “I chose this piece because...”, “I would like you to notice that...”, and “One thing I would improve next time is...”⁸⁶

Portfolios allow learners to demonstrate their self-assessment skills through documentation, comparison, and integration.⁸⁷ Learners provide justification for items selected, look for improvement as they compare recent work with earlier work, and demonstrate their independence by providing examples of their growing oral and written proficiency as evidence that they have met learning outcomes.

⁸² Chambers, 2011.

⁸³ For more discussion regarding e-portfolios, see Chambers, 2011.

⁸⁴ See Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 196.

⁸⁵ Bow Valley College, 2009, p. 194.

⁸⁶ Bow Valley College, p. 193.

⁸⁷ O’Malley & Pierce, 1996, p. 36.



For specific guidance regarding assessment of ESL literacy learners, and for discussion regarding the use of portfolios with ESL literacy learners, see *Stage 4: Integrate Assessment in Learning for LIFE: An ESL Literacy Curriculum Framework*.

Conclusion

In this section, we have highlighted the connection between learning outcomes and assessment. Learning outcomes are based on the needs of the learners and are clearly communicated to learners, instructors, and other stakeholders. They are worded in such a way that they provide a focus for teaching and learning, and can be measured and assessed. Using General Learning Outcomes, Specific Learning Outcomes, and Performance Indicators can help ensure that outcomes are clear, specific, and measurable. Learner assessment, then, is directly tied to the specified outcomes. It is valid, comprehensive, meaningful, inclusive, and reliable. What will be assessed and how learners will be assessed is communicated clearly to the learners, who are invited to participate in the assessment process. Assessment is part of the learning process and includes both assessment for learning and assessment of learning. Rubrics and portfolios have been presented as assessment tools which reflect outcomes, involve learners, and can be used for both formative and summative assessment. The next section of the *ATESL Curriculum Framework* addresses **tasks** as both a means for instructors to sequence and integrate instruction and content,⁸⁸ and a means for learners to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes.

⁸⁸ I.e., instruction and content supporting learning outcomes related to mindful learning, intercultural communicative competence, e-learning, reading, writing, listening, speaking, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, professional content, etc.

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