ALN
ASSESSMENT LEARNING NETWORK

LEARNING POINT

What's in a name?

How the ALN uses key assessment terms

Student assessment, like many fields, has its own terminology to describe activities in the field. The purpose of this Learning Point is to clarify some of these terms, and—in some cases—explain some misconceptions about them. There are several terms used to describe assessments and how the results from them are reported. Some of these terms are described below.

Balanced assessment system

A **balanced assessment system** is one in which different types of student assessment are used, as appropriate, for different purposes/uses, often combining state-chosen and locally selected assessment options.

Multiple Measures – The use of different types of measures to assess students or programs from somewhat different perspectives in order to obtain a broader picture of students or a program.

Assessments *for* Learning – Assessments used to guide learning as it is occurring in the classroom.

Assessments *of* Learning – Assessments used to measure how much students have learned at the conclusion of instruction, at the classroom, school, district, or state levels.

Formative Assessment Practices – Activities that teachers and students engage in during an instructional sequence to monitor and adjust the learning activities in order to maximize student learning. *Misconception alert*: It is imprecise to refer to "formative assessments." The assessment isn't the defining characteristic; it is the use of the data that distinguishes a formative assessment practice.

Assessment methods

Achievement Test – Used to determine the current level of knowledge and skills of an individual.

Aptitude Test – Used to predict the ability of an individual to carry out a task or activity.

Diagnostic Test – Used to determine the areas of strength and weakness of an individual.

Interviews – A strategy used by teachers to discover students' current level of understanding. In this type of assessment, a teacher typically asks an individual student a series of planned and/or unplanned questions, and records students' responses to the questions.

Performance Assessments – Used to discover students' ability to apply their learning. Students are asked to perform in some manner, such as completing an experiment in science, conducting an investigation in science, writing in response to a prompt such as source documents in social studies, singing, acting out a character in a theatrical production, or drawing in an arts class. The products of performance assessment can be many types. Performance assessments typically require a checklist or a rubric for scoring.

Assessment reports

Norm-Referenced Score Interpretations – The comparison of a student score or school score to a representative sample of students or schools – the norm group. Scores are interpreted as above or below the average (mean score) of the norm group.

Criterion-Referenced Score Interpretations – Relating a test score to a pre-established absolute standard of performance, typically described in a performance standard such as "proficient." *Misconception alert:* A test is neither a norm-referenced nor a criterion-referenced test. The scores from any test can be reported in either manner. Tests will generally be constructed slightly differently based on whether they are designed to provide criterion- or norm-referenced score interpretations.

Technical terms used in association with assessment

Multiple meanings of "average"

There are different situations when each of the following "average" scores is most suitable for use.

Mean – The arithmetic average of a set of data, calculated by adding up all the scores and dividing by the number of scores.

Mode – The most frequently occurring score in a set of scores.

Median – The score at the middle point in a set of scores also referred to as the 50th percentile (%ile).

Measures of variability

Showing how variable a group of scores are is another way to describe performance of a group of students.

Variance – The deviation of each score in a set of scores from the mean score of the set, squared.

Standard Deviation – The square root of the variance of each score in a set of scores, divided by the number of scores.

Measures of assessment quality

These terms describe some of the necessary conditions for an assessment to be considered useful.

Reliability – A determination of the internal consistency, comparability, or stability of an assessment. Reliability does not describe the value of the assessment or the results from it.

Validity – The collection of evidence to support the intended uses of an assessment. Note: The test itself is not "valid" or "not valid." It is the uses of the assessment that are or are not valid.
Misconception alert: Be sure to use these assessment terms correctly, because they are used differently in assessment than in common parlance. Note that no data can support the valid use of test scores if the reliability of the test is low.

Fairness – Refers to the assurance that all students have equal access to the assessment and equal opportunity to respond to it without the negative influence of any extraneous variable. This includes the provision of universal supports (available to all students) and accommodations available under controlled conditions to students such as English learners or students with disabilities.

Bias – This occurs when the way in which a test question is posed disadvantages some students (due to factors other than their knowledge of the topic being assessed).

Sensitivity – The use of a topic in an assessment item that some students may find troubling or offensive. Good assessments take steps (e.g., bias and sensitivity reviews) to reduce bias and avoid sensitive topics so students' achievement can be more accurately determined.

To learn more

Review the Glossary section of the MAC Assessment Literacy Standards (MAC, 2017)
https://tinyurl.com/MAC-Literacy

"Understanding Technical Concepts Used in Student Assessment."
Introductory MAC Assessment Learning Module
https://www.michiganassessmentconsortium.org/almodules/