

3. Developing Productive Skills Assessment Tasks

This chapter addresses a number of questions that might arise as you develop your productive skills assessment tasks. We begin by suggesting a number of task types that might be useful in your classroom, before demonstrating how you might use the CLB 2012 document to align your task to the abilities of the learners in your class and to select your assessment criteria. We end by discussing special concerns related to setting up productive skills assessment tasks.

How can I Develop Assessment Tasks that Reflect Real-World Concerns?

In order to assess learners' productive skills you will need to develop assessment tasks that allow learners to demonstrate real-world speaking and writing skills – skills that will be useful in their interactions outside of the classroom.

Choosing a Task Type

You have as many options for task types as there are speaking and writing opportunities in the real world. The two charts below describe several options that have worked well in Adult ESL classrooms.

Task Types for Speaking

TASK TYPE	SAMPLE TASKS WHERE THIS MIGHT BE APPLIED
Role play	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ CLB 2: Role play making a simple food order.▪ CLB 5: Role play inviting a friend to lunch.
Story (re)telling (may be picture-cued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ CLB 4: Use family photos to tell a short story about a vacation.▪ CLB 5: Describe an accident you had to a friend.
Oral interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ CLB 1: Answer two or three personal information questions (name, address and phone number) to obtain a library card.▪ CLB 6: Answer questions about educational background, work experience, and skills in a job interview.
Instructions/Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ CLB 3: Give directions to the nearest washroom a new student (e.g., "Go down the hall. Turn right.").▪ CLB 8: Give detailed instructions on how to set up Quickbooks to keep track of personal expenses.



PRACTICE-BASED CONCERNS....

"I find speaking assessment frustrating because roleplays take so much time. Any suggestions?"

"I use a rating scale for my writing assessment tool but I wonder – are rubrics better?"

Panel discussion or debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 5: Participate in a panel discussion and give opinions about whether the school should have a daycare. ▪ CLB 7: Participate in a debate about a community issue (e.g., creating new bike lanes).
Oral report/presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 4: Tell a classmate who was absent about the lesson and homework from the previous day. ▪ CLB 8: Give a researched presentation on one oil extraction method currently in use.
Demonstration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 3: Demonstrate what to do and what not to do in a fire drill (e.g., not taking a purse or jacket, not taking an elevator, walking to designated safe area, waiting). ▪ CLB 5: Demonstrate the use of an appliance, machine, or system at work to a new co-worker.
Small group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 4 Discuss plans for an end of term event at school. ▪ CLB 7 Participate in a work meeting and give suggestions on how to resolve a health and safety issue.

Task Types for Writing

TASK TYPE	SAMPLE TASKS WHERE THIS MIGHT BE APPLIED
Story (re)telling (may be picture-cued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 1: Complete a guided text about yourself. ▪ CLB 5: Write a paragraph about a story heard in the news.
Notetaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 2: Copy the company name, address, application deadline, and contact information from a simple job ad. ▪ CLB 8: Take notes (for later use) while reading a detailed online text about how to re-image a computer.
Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 4: Write a short email to a classmate asking if s/he would like to work on a project with you. ▪ CLB 6: Write a personal note expressing an apology.
Personal letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 4: Write a short letter thanking a host for the dinner party. ▪ CLB 5: Write a letter to a friend expressing sympathy for the loss of a loved one.
Business letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 3: Write a brief letter to a landlord giving notice on a rental. ▪ CLB 7: Write a letter to the head of an academic department requesting a review of course marks.
Memos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 4: Write a brief memo reminding staff to recycle (paper, cans, bottles, etc.). ▪ CLB 6: Write a workplace memo addressing a particular problem (e.g., staff leaving dirty dishes, parking in no-parking areas).
Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 5: Write a brief report about a local event for a community newsletter. ▪ CLB 7: Write a production report on work stoppage times and reasons.
Forms and applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 1: Complete the personal identification information on a change of address form. ▪ CLB 8: Complete a scholarship application for university.
Instructions or Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CLB 3: Describe end of shift procedures in a short note to a work colleague (e.g., putting chairs away, turning off machines, turning off lights, locking the door). ▪ CLB 6: Describe the process of applying for a job in a letter to a friend.

Ensuring your Task is Consistent with the CLB

As with all assessments, you can use the [CLB 2012 document](#) to check that the speaking or writing assessment task aligns to the CLB level(s) of the learners in your classroom and that the assessment criteria align with the CLB level. The steps below outline this process using the example task, *Send an Email about a Trip to a Co-Worker*, for CLB 4.

SELECT THE COMPETENCY AREA(S)

The CLB competencies are organized into four **Competency Area(s)** located to the right of the Profile of Ability for each benchmark; for speaking and writing these include *Interacting with Others*, *Giving Instructions/Reproducing Information (writing only)*, *Getting Things Done*, and *Sharing Information*. As a first step, select the competency area(s) that most closely reflects the purpose of the task. For example, in the task *Email a Co-Worker about a Trip*, the purpose is to describe a personal experience, so *Sharing Information* (communication to inform others) is appropriate. If the email also included a few sentences for the purpose of sharing and making enquiries of a personal nature (e.g., health, family...), you could consider adding the competency *Interacting with Others*.

In cases where a task conceivably draws on more than one Competency Area, you might choose to assess both or only one, based on your judgement of which is the most relevant to the task and to the larger goals guiding the class, as determined in early and ongoing needs assessments.

DETERMINE IF YOUR TASK IS LEVEL APPROPRIATE.

Once you have selected the assessment task, you should confirm that the task (and your expectations) are appropriate for the CLB level of your class. This involves a scan of the Profile of Ability, Some Features of Communication, the appropriate Competency Area(s) and the Knowledge and Strategies page.

1. The **Profile of Ability** is listed on the left of the page for each speaking or writing benchmark (and also provided in table form at the beginning of each Stage).

If your task is at Writing Benchmark 4, for example, the **Profile of Ability** (pictured to the right) indicates that learners would be expected to write short, simple texts about personal experiences and familiar topics. The expectations for the communication are also summarized: among other expectations, it should be grammatically and lexically simple, and intended for a familiar reader. These considerations would remind instructors to set up the sample task, *Send an*

Profile of Ability

The writer can:
Write short, simple texts about personal experience and familiar topics or situations related to daily life and experience.

When the communication is:
Grammatically and lexically simple
Intended for a familiar reader
Short
In non-demanding contexts

Demonstrating these strengths and limitations:
Adequate knowledge of the language for simple tasks
Adequate range of simple everyday vocabulary
Adequate control of simple structures
Conveys personal information in mostly single-clause sentences
May use some coordinated clauses with basic tenses
Adequate control of spelling, punctuation and capitalization
Difficulty with word order and word forms may sometimes interfere with comprehensibility
Able to communicate a simple message

Profile of Ability, Writing Benchmark 4 (CLB, 2012a, p. 118)

Email about a Trip to a Co-Worker, in a way that allows learners to write a short text about their trip, using simple language, for a familiar reader.

The **Profile of Ability** also describes the strengths and limitations of communication demonstrated by learners at this Benchmark. It indicates expectations for knowledge of language, range of vocabulary, and use of coordinate clauses, among other features of communication.

2. The **Some Features of Communication** table for writing found at the end of Stage I Writing (with the CLB 4 column presented here, to the right), expands on characteristics of written communication for each Stage I benchmark. At Benchmark 4, the Some Features of Communication table stipulates that in addition to communication being grammatically and lexically simple, and intended for a familiar audience, prompts would be simple, and forms would be limited in length, along with other considerations. In the example task *Send an Email about a Trip to a Co-Worker*, the features indicated by the arrows in the chart might be particularly important: learners should be able to use an informal style, and the prompt should be simple, calling for responses of about one paragraph.

CLB 4 Fluent Basic Ability	
Writing style requirements are simple and informal.	←
Topics are of everyday relevance.	
Audience is familiar.	
Task prompts or instructions are simple and call for responses of about 1 paragraph.	←
Forms to complete are short (up to about 20 items), simple in format, and require basic personal information and some responses to simple questions about self or experience.	
Content to copy or reproduce is from a short text (up to about 2 paragraphs) with clear layout; may be of a more specialized nature (e.g., a manual) relating to a familiar context.*	
Context is non-demanding.	

Some Features of Communication, Writing Benchmark 4 (CCLB, 2012a, p. 120)

3. As a next step, you might scan the **Competency Statement(s)** and **Sample Indicators of Ability** of the selected **Competency Area(s)** for additional information that confirms the task is level appropriate. At CLB 4, the competency area *Sharing Information* states that learners should be able to “Write a short paragraph to describe a familiar situation... personal experience....” This expectation would be consistent with the sample task, asking learners to send an email to a co-worker to describe a trip.

The **Sample Indicators of Ability** listed under each Competency Statement are listed in orange. In the box reprinted here, describing the Competency area *Sharing Information*, the sample indicators of

IV. Sharing Information

- Write a short paragraph to describe a familiar situation, event, personal experience or future plan.
[Writing is about 1 paragraph.]
- Uses basic paragraph structure. ←
- Follows most spelling and punctuation conventions. ←
- Conveys main ideas and supports them with some detail.
- Describes the situation adequately so that a reader can follow. ←
- Expresses preferences relevant to the content and with some supporting explanation.
- Demonstrates strengths and limitations typical of Writing Benchmark 4, as listed in the Profile of Ability.

Indicators of Ability, Writing Benchmark Level 4 (CCLB, 2012a, p.

ability indicated by arrows would be relevant to the task: uses basic paragraph structure, follows most spelling and punctuation conventions, and describes the situation adequately so that a reader can follow.

4. For additional ideas for indicators that may be appropriate to the task and benchmark, you should also review the **Knowledge and Strategies** pages for the Stage, reprinted below. In the email to a co-worker task, you might select items such as those marked with arrows below.

Knowledge and Strategies

STAGE I

These are some things that may need to be learned as an individual moves through Stage I Writing.

<p>Grammatical Knowledge</p> <p><i>Ability to use:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic grammar structures (such as simple and continuous verb tenses, simple modals, comparatives, and superlatives) to convey meaning effectively Basic syntax (such as indications of a statement, a negative, or a question; word order; prepositional phrases, and coordination and subordination) Simple yes/no and wh- questions Common everyday English spelling and punctuation rules and conventions for simple sentences Vocabulary and expressions needed to write about familiar, everyday topics (such as shopping, housing, daily routines, dates, banking, food, health, education, jobs, businesses, families, customs, weather, clothing, travel, safety, citizenship) Vocabulary needed to complete a variety of forms, such as personal identification vocabulary <p>Textual Knowledge</p> <p><i>Beginning ability to use:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common cohesion links (such as pronoun references) to connect sentences Connective words and phrases within and between sentences to indicate addition (such as <i>also</i>, <i>and</i>) and sequence (such as <i>first</i>, <i>second</i>, <i>next</i>) Logical sequencing to get main and subordinate ideas across 	<p>Functional Knowledge</p> <p><i>Beginning ability to use:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate phrases and expressions for salutations, and to invite, thank, and congratulate Common text formats for specific purposes (such as informal notes and goodwill messages) Basic format and paragraph structure Basic email writing conventions (such as subject lines and opening/closing conventions) ← Basic business writing conventions (such as stating the purpose in the first paragraph, using a subject line, and basic paragraph structure) <p><i>Beginning ability to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the layout and different parts of standard forms (such as headings, instructions, and areas to complete) <p>Sociolinguistic Knowledge</p> <p><i>Understanding of and beginning ability to use:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Canadian social conventions related to specific occasions (such as births, marriages and losses) and the significance of written messages or cards for these occasions <p>Strategic Competence</p> <p><i>Beginning ability to use:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources such as dictionaries, thesauruses, Internet search skills, and spell-checking functions on a computer ←
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Knowledge and strategies, Stage I Writing, (CCLB, 2012a, p. 111)

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Chapter 3: Developing Productive Skills Assessment Tasks

SELECT LEVEL-APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR THE TASK

Once you've determined your task is aligned with the CLB, you are ready to select appropriate assessment criteria for the task. Using the indicators you have already noted from the Sample Indicators of Ability, Demonstrating these Strengths and Limitations section, and the Knowledge and Strategies page, ask yourself "What is most important for the learner to do to complete the task successfully?"

NOTE: When selecting indicators, remember that those identified in the CLB document are samples, providing "an overall sense of the types of requirements that may arise from a task... the actual indicators for each authentic language task are determined by the purpose and context of the communication" (CCLB, 2012a, p. XVII).

This checklist can help you choose the assessment criteria most relevant to your task:

- ✓ **Choose criteria most critical to effective communication in this task.** For example, when speakers are making introductions, the appropriate use of non-verbal features (eye contact, handshake) is critical to effective communication. In another conversational situation, effective use of conversation management strategies might be critical, for example, using questions to extend the conversation.
- ✓ **Ensure the assessment criteria are tied to the learning goals for this unit of study.**
- ✓ **Ensure the assessment criteria relate to classroom teaching and learning.** For example, if the assessment task will require the use of sequence markers, the markers will have been taught or reviewed in class.
- ✓ **Choose a manageable number of criteria for learners and for the person giving feedback.**
- ✓ **Adjust the criteria for learners who are working at a higher or lower CLB level.**

For example in the task *Send an Email about a Trip to a Co-Worker*, you might choose

- Conveys the main ideas and supports them in some detail,
- Uses adequate range of simple everyday vocabulary,
- Follows basic email writing conventions,
- Adequate control of simple structures with some coordinated clauses.

Determining What Constitutes Task Success

To determine what constitutes success at the task level, you will consider the assessment criteria that you have chosen, and choose those that are most important to success in the task at hand. These will be your criteria for task success.

CONSIDERING HOLISTIC AND ANALYTIC CRITERIA FOR TASK SUCCESS

You should limit the number of criteria for task success to what is manageable – both for the learner and for yourself, as the person assessing and giving feedback. Begin by asking which assessment criteria are most important for effective communication in this task. Instructors

often identify holistic criteria (showing overall effectiveness) and analytic criteria (specific criteria related to the quality of communication).

For example, in the CLB 5 speaking task – *In a Small Group Discussion, Plan an Event; Discuss Different Options and Come to an Agreement* – you might decide that a learner’s overall participation in a discussion must be clear (a holistic criteria), in addition to the specific criteria that the learner expresses opinions, agrees/disagrees appropriately, and employs strategies to check understanding (analytic criteria). These criteria and the level of performance expected would be shared with learners and included in the assessment tool.

In both Classrooms 1 and 2, the instructors use assessment tools that indicate overall/holistic and specific/analytic criteria for task success, and the expectations regarding the number of these criteria that must be met if the learner performance is to be deemed successful.

MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT SCORING AND WEIGHTING

If the purpose of the task is assessment *of* learning, you will need to decide what constitutes success. One approach would be to highlight which criteria must be met to achieve success. Another is to use a numeric score, in which case you will need to indicate the overall score or percentage required for success. You might consider weighting the most important assessment criteria more heavily than other criteria. For example, in a CLB 2 speaking task, whether or not the message is complete might receive greater weighting than pronunciation or sentence structure.

What Special Considerations Arise when Setting Up Productive Skills Assessments?

In this section we present two considerations with special importance for productive skills assessment tasks: choosing an appropriate assessment tool, and setting up speaking tasks.

Choosing an Assessment Tool

Feedback to learners should be clear, action-oriented, and linked to learning intents. A good assessment tool will make it easier for you to provide this sort of feedback.

A good assessment tool will also help you make sound decisions about learner skills. It will be based on assessment criteria (which have in turn been linked to CLB-aligned indicators of ability), and will present the specific criteria for task success applicable to the assessment task. In line with principles of assessment *for* learning, the tool will also be presented in learner-friendly language, making the assessment process transparent to learners, and enabling them to use the tools to assess their own learning.

You have many options for assessment tools; several are presented below, and others can be found in the [CLB Support Kit](#) (CCLBb, 2012).

CHECKLISTS

A checklist is easy to construct and use, and facilitates efficient feedback on performance.

Sample Checklist

Name		CLB Level
		2
Topic:	Employment	
Writing Task:	Copy information from a simple job advertisement (company name, address, application deadline, contact information).	
	😊	Comments:
*Information complete.		
Company name uses capitals. Example: Hudson Bay Company		
*Address mostly correct and with correct spacing.		
*Contact information mostly correct. example: 1 402 555 5555 or xxxxx@cccc.ca		
Date is correct.		

Checklists can be particularly useful for informal feedback when assessing *for* learning. When your purpose is assessment *of* learning, you will need to adapt the form to indicate the criteria for task success.

RATING SCALES

Rating scales are also easy to construct, and allow the instructor to assess gradations of success in a task.

Sample Rating Scale

Name		CLB Level		
		6		
TOPIC: Safety at work				
SPEAKING TASK: Tell a supervisor about a work related injury or “near miss”.				
		Meets expectations	Almost	Not Yet
*Holistic: Achieved the purpose of the task.				
Analytic: *The cause of the incident was clear.				

*The sequence of events was clear.			
Some control of complex sentences.			
You checked to make sure the listener understood.			
Criteria for Task Success = Meets expectations on * items yes no			
Continue:			
Next Time:			

A number of sample rating scales can be found in the *CLB Support Kit* (CCLB, 2012b, pp. 37, 93, 94, and others). Scales can be numeric (e.g., 1-5), descriptive (e.g., yes, almost, not yet), or even visual (e.g., happy face / neutral face / sad face emoticons). This flexibility makes it easy to develop level-appropriate rating scales. The *CLB Support Kit* also provides a useful overview of options for scales and other evaluation elements (CCLB, 2012b, p. 94).

RUBRICS

Rubrics present assessment criteria in a series of descriptors, according to level of success. They are complex and time consuming to develop and are most effective when learners have the opportunity to become familiar with them. They can be adapted for self-assessment, but because of the heavy language load, are most appropriate for use with higher level learners.

The rubric below was used for a writing assignment in an academic bridging program, one of the classroom examples profiled in the 2005 edition of this resource package (Holmes, 2005). At the base of the rubric, the scores are interpreted and the criteria for task success given.

Sample Rubric

Name		CLB Level 7
Task: <i>Discussion of Culture Shock Survey</i>		
Comments:		
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS		
2	Writing does not accomplish the purpose of the task. It is difficult understanding the writer's meaning in several places. The style and voice do not match the purpose.	
4	Writing generally accomplishes the purpose of the task. There are some places where the meaning isn't completely clear because information is missing or there are language errors.	
6	Writing accomplishes the purpose of the task. Adequate information is included and it is easy to understand what the writer is trying to say. The style and voice are appropriate for the purpose of the writing.	
8	Writing accomplishes the purpose of the task. There is additional detail or analysis beyond what is required. The text is clearly written and the style and voice match the purpose of the writing. The writing is convincing and fluent.	

WORD CHOICE	
1	Almost no vocabulary specific to the topic. The choice of words sometimes causes confusion.
2	Some vocabulary specific to the topic. There are some problems with correct word form.
3	Several instances of vocabulary specific to the topic. The other vocabulary used is appropriate to the purpose of the task. Most vocabulary is used correctly.
4	Many instances of vocabulary specific to the topic. Throughout the text the word choice is accurate and precise. In almost all cases vocabulary is used correctly and appropriately.
ORGANIZATION	
1	Organization is weak. There isn't a clear introduction and conclusion. It is difficult to follow the organization of the main body of the text.
2	Organization is developing but there is still some difficulty with organization. Either the introduction or conclusion may be unclear or may not be closely related to the body of the text. There may be some difficulty with logical development of ideas.
3	Organization is satisfactory. There is a clear introduction and conclusion that connects to the body of the text. There is clear, logical development and the paragraph structure is appropriate.
4	Very strong organization. The introduction provides a clear lead into the text. The organization flows smoothly. Paragraph structure matches the purpose. The conclusion provides a satisfying summary to the text.
SENTENCE STRUCTURE	
1	Text includes many sentence errors which make it difficult to understand. Few or no complex structures are used.
2	Some use of complex structures. There are sentence errors but they don't generally interfere with understanding.
3	Writer uses a variety of sentences, including many complex structures. Occasional sentence errors occur but they do not interfere with understanding.
4	Writer uses a variety of complex structures to connect ideas and provide coherence. The sentences flow naturally. Few sentence errors.
USE OF GRAPHS AND CHARTS	
1	Graphs and charts are confusing. They do not show what they are intended to show. They do not connect to the information in the body of the text.
2	The graphs and charts generally show the information they are intended to show. In some cases the information in the charts and graphs does not clearly connect to the body of the text.
3	The graphs and charts display the information they are intended to show. There is a clear connection to the information in the body of the text.
4	The graphs and charts are used effectively to support and illustrate the information in the body of the text. The links between the charts and graphs and the text are clear.
<p>1 = unable to achieve yet; 2 = developing; 3 = satisfactory benchmark achievement; 4 = more than satisfactory achievement.</p> <p>A score of 17/24 is considered satisfactory achievement of the task.</p>	

Sample Rubric, developed by Clare Myers (in Holmes, 2005, pp.91-92)

Setting up Speaking Tasks

Collecting evidence of learning from writing tasks is fairly simple: learners work on the assessment task, and the product of the task can be carried away for interpretation at a later time. Speaking tasks, however, present a few unique challenges.

APPROACHES TO SPEAKING TASKS

Traditionally, we have assessed learners' speaking skills through one-on-one assessment interviews or class presentations. While there are advantages to these approaches, they have their limitations. Most importantly, they represent only two of the many speaking situations that learners will encounter outside the classroom, and relying heavily on them restricts the representative nature of assessment. In addition, both of these approaches are time-intensive, and because of time constraints, may not be used very often during a single term. A number of factors influence how you will set up a speaking task: the purpose of the task, class size, and time available. The table below suggests several options.

Approaches to Speaking Tasks

METHOD	SAMPLE TASK TYPES	ADVANTAGES / DISADVANTAGES / CONSIDERATIONS
Individual or Small Group Performances Individuals or small groups present to the class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral reports ▪ Panel discussions ▪ Role plays ▪ Interviews ▪ Demonstrations ▪ Speaking chains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Observing all students may be very time-consuming in large classes. ▪ Performances provide an opportunity for peer feedback, engaging observing peers actively in the performance. ▪ The instructor has the opportunity to observe and evaluate each learner as he or she completes the task.
Small Groups (or Partners) Simultaneous Tasks <i>Teacher circulates as small groups engage in task</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Role plays ▪ Discussions ▪ Interviews ▪ Story retelling ▪ Information gap ▪ Concentric circles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All learners are engaged and can practise the task a number of times. ▪ In large classes, teacher may not be able to observe the performance of all learners (but may choose to focus on selected learners and choose to evaluate other learners on other tasks). ▪ Feedback may be most effective if the observation focuses on one aspect of communication (e.g. use of questioning strategies). ▪ Audiotaping or videotaping simultaneous group tasks may be difficult due to background noise, unless breakout rooms are available.
Resource Fair Presentations <i>Learners present at stations as classmates, instructors and, if possible, peers from other classrooms circulate.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Oral reports ▪ Interviews ▪ Demonstrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Learners have opportunity to present their information a number of times. ▪ In order to ensure an audience, peers from other classrooms will need to attend, or presentations will need to be staged, with part of the group presenting simultaneously, and part of the group acting as audience members. ▪ Teacher has time to circulate to each of the groups and evaluate the presentations and make anecdotal notes.

(Adapted from Holmes, Kingwell, Pettis, & Pidlaski, 2001, p. 152)

COLLECTING ASSESSMENT INFORMATION FROM SPEAKING TASKS

Writing tasks naturally produce evidence that can be used to assess learner progress towards learning goals. Speaking tasks, however, do not produce tangible, lasting evidence, so assessment depends on either capturing assessment information in the moment, or recording evidence for later use.

Advances in technology provide instructors with creative options for capturing, sharing, and assessing learners' spoken performances. Many learners are familiar with the video applications available on phones and other devices, and as a result, are less intimidated by performing for a recording than might have been the case in the past. Learners also often bring these devices to class and are skilled in using them with very little set up time.

The table below presents a number of options for capturing and reviewing learners' spoken performances, with relevant advantages, disadvantages and considerations.

Collecting Information from Speaking Tasks

PROCESS	ADVANTAGES / DISADVANTAGES / CONSIDERATIONS
Audio Recording	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Simple and easy to set up. Equipment is readily available, and many learners will have recording applications on their phones or other devices. ▪ Excellent tool for in-the-moment feedback on pronunciation and other vocal characteristics. ▪ Useful for monologic tasks (e.g. story retelling, audio journals). ▪ Can be used in class (both in large or small group settings) or outside of the classroom (in a language lab, small breakout rooms, or at home).
Video Recording	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Excellent tool for use with interactional tasks (captures body language, conversation management strategies, etc.). ▪ Allows learners to view and reflect on their own and their peers' performances. Footage can be uploaded on video sharing platforms for this purpose*, as long as sharing settings are carefully restricted. ▪ Enables thorough interpretation of performances for assessment purposes (footage can be replayed a number of times). ▪ Requires planning in terms of set-up and use of equipment if digital cameras are used. Many learners will have video applications on phones and devices, suitable for instant feedback, but challenging if footage needs to be shared with instructor. Personal devices may produce large files that slow the video sharing process; digital cameras will produce more compact files, making the sharing process more efficient. ▪ May increase learner nervousness, if learners are unaccustomed to being recorded. The instructor may need to work to establish a reassuring tone, or might use recording equipment in other contexts to increase learners' ease with the recording process.
Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Requires no equipment set-up. ▪ Allows immediate feedback. ▪ Limits time for making judgments (no opportunity to replay the performance).

Learner Self-Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Helps learners to reflect on their performance in relation to assessment criteria. ▪ Provides useful information on aspects of learning not observable to the teacher. ▪ Does not provide evidence of learner performance.
Peer Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Helps peer assessors reflect on learning intents and assessment criteria through carefully selected peer assessment questions. ▪ Provides useful information from the perspective of the audience. ▪ May not provide reliable evidence of learner performance.

*At the time of writing, YouTube, Google Drive, and Vimeo were three easily available video sharing platforms, all allowing instructors to share and control access to videos.

(Adapted from Holmes et al., 2001, p. 152)

Reflections on Your Practice

1. Consider a speaking task that you have used recently. Did you set it up as a performance (individual or small group), as simultaneous tasks, or as a resource fair? Brainstorm an alternative approach. What classroom management considerations would be important? If you needed to collect assessment information, how would you capture that information?
2. Consider a writing assessment tool that you have used recently. Do you have holistic and analytic criteria? Have you focussed on a few key criteria? Review your assessment criteria. Are all equally important, or should you weight some criteria more heavily than others?

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