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## Rethinking Summative Assessments while Pivoting to Online Teaching

by Jordan Gusich & Laura Colantonio

### Introduction

The COVID-19 crisis has necessitated adaptation from the IEP field. An essential facet of any instruction is assessment, which allows instructors and curriculum designers to track students' development and to ensure curricular goals and objectives are being met. With a sudden shift to online instruction, it becomes readily apparent that much of the in-person, observable assessments that IEPs are accustomed to become problematic. It is our goal here to offer general guidance to IEP instructors, curriculum designers, and administrators in principled practices of online language assessment.

### Understanding Assessment

The two main forms of assessment that instructors deal with regularly are formative and summative. These two types of assessment differ in terms of goals and purposes (Formative and Summative Assessments, n.d.). Formative assessments involve the gathering of information in order to identify aspects of language that need further development. Once these weak points are identified, instructors can design activities that scaffold learners toward attainment of goals and objectives; the goal is efficient and effective development. Summative assessments, on the other hand, are more consistent with what are commonly known as tests and exams. Summative assessments judge and rate the extent to which learners have achieved goals and objectives; the goal is evaluation. The focus here is on summative assessments which, unfortunately, are more complex than formative ones in an online environment due their high stakes nature. Students feel pressure and often resort to tactics which undermine the validity summative assessments. Learning online can exacerbate academic dishonesty due to the lack of vigilance from instructors.

As such, we need to ensure our summative assessments remain effective while teaching online (Lathrop & Foss, 2000).

### Ensuring Valid and Reliable Assessment Online

Technology has come a long way in replicating the proctored classroom environment. There are applications, exam platforms, and features of learning management systems (LMSs) that can track keystrokes, utilize webcams and microphones, and lockdown browsers of the end-user all with artificial intelligence noting and flagging suspicious activities. This technology deserves a further exploration, but we will focus on pedagogical options which can be implemented without the need of a third party. When adapting a course for online purposes, it is often more effective to rethink and redesign summative assessments rather than reapplying what has previously been done or planned in the classroom. First, we present a few of our favorite ideas to help mitigate academic dishonesty in an online teaching environment ("Best Practice Strategies to Promote Academic Integrity in Online Education.," 2009; Rowe, 2004). Then, we offer a few of our preferred types of summative assessments to consider while teaching online (Alternatives to Traditional Exams and Papers, n.d.; Kim & Yazdian, 2014).

### Strategies to Lessen Academic Dishonesty

- Define, explain, and discuss academic dishonesty: In our field, there are different views and conceptualizations of what constitutes cheating. It is essential to ensure that everyone is clear about what academic honesty is and what its consequences are. Likewise, it is crucial to remind students that academic dishonesty hurts the student more than anyone – particularly for language learning. Suitable for just about any IEP class, academic integrity can be a topic for reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Students should be engaged with this topic early and often.
- Discuss, design, and create an academic honesty statement: As part of any IEP course, students and teachers can work together to develop a statement, or a contract, to abide by for the duration of the course.

- It is helpful to capture student voices in this statement. Keep this statement handy in the course LMS and have students sign it before any and every online assessment as a reminder.
- Develop specific rubrics: For each assessment, detailed rubrics should be provided for students highlighting what they will be evaluated upon. Rubrics help students' perceptions of the assignment align with the instructors. Therefore, students feel more capable of completing the task with their own abilities.
- Know those being assessed: Having an engaged presence in our students' online learning process offers teachers an understanding of where students are in their development. With this understanding, it becomes easier to spot work that does not reflect a student's stage of development. Likewise, having a strong teacher-learner relationship eases what are often difficult discussions.

### Alternative Summative Assessments

- Portfolios or multi-stage projects: Instead of having one big assessment at the end of the term, consider a portfolio (a collection) of smaller tasks and assignments that lead up to a more substantial product. Documenting progress, providing feedback, and communicating throughout the creation of the portfolio allow teachers to track growth granularly, minimize pressure for students, and prevent a wholesale copy-and-paste submission. Reflections on students' work can be included where they present meta-analyses and describe processes they utilized. Instructors can evaluate these portfolios holistically and corroborate the multiple aspects of the portfolio for assessment. Portfolios and projects can be applied to any language skill. Moreover, they can be published within the class LMS only or beyond if desired.
- Briefings: Though they require a video-meeting platform, one-on-one interviews or small group discussions can be great ways to evaluate students in lieu of traditional paper and pencil tests. This is an obvious solution for speaking classes, but consider including them as part of reading, writing, listening, or grammar courses where students can reflect, describe, and explain the work they have accomplished. These talks can then be analyzed and included in the assessment.
- Other types of performances: We are lucky at IEPs in that we focus more on the medium (language) than the content. We can be creative with our content and performances which can provide evidence for curricular objectives. Perhaps students can have the opportunity to present a grammar point and administer a test to their classmates. They might interview teachers for a blog-post, or maybe they collect information for a news show that they design and produce. Evaluating students doing something with language can often be much more insightful than scores on a test and much more difficult to be deceitful.

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