

How to Use This Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to establish a framework for the role of assessment within the BHSS Educators Guide. It defines key assessment-related terms with clear operational definitions to promote a shared understanding across institutions and ensure that assessments are designed and implemented in ways that effectively support learners. Instructors will find practical examples of assessment tools from BHSS curricula, including teaching and learning rationale across the various stages of curriculum delivery and learner development. This chapter can be used at any point in review of the BHSS Educators Guide; it may be particularly useful for anyone who is new to assessment strategies or would like to see how assessments can be operationalized in a BHSS curriculum.

Assessment Approach & Framework

The BHSS Project Team, led by experienced instructional designers, developed the assessment approach presented in the BHSS Educators Guide.

Grounded in Backward Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), the framework begins by identifying the BHSS desired outcomes of a BHSS curriculum. Using a competency-based framework, these outcomes are structured into overarching meta-competencies with more specific, measurable competencies nested within them.

To ensure clarity and alignment with best practices, competencies were written using measurable verbs, following [Bloom's Taxonomy](#) (Bloom, 1956). Each competency was further broken down into individual [learning objectives](#) to describe the underlying [knowledge](#), [skills](#), and [attitudes](#) required (Dave, 1970).

The assessment framework provides instructors with tools to evaluate whether students have met the desired outcomes. By aligning assessments with learning objectives, the framework ensures that planned activities effectively measure student progress, serving as a bridge between instructional activities and BHSS curricular outcomes.

Learning isn't a discrete process but an iterative one, and well-designed and well-planned assessments enable instructors to gauge the extent to which learners are progressing toward proficiency in learning objectives. Assessments allow for the customization of course content, learning activities, and graded assignments to better align with learners' experiences, prior knowledge, skills, and interests. Assessments also provide valuable insights that support real-time course improvements, ensuring the instruction remains responsive and effective.

Defining Assessment

As defined in the BHSS Implementation Guide, **assessments** refer to the process of gathering evidence to determine whether intended learning has occurred and learning objectives have been met, both formally and informally. Assessments involve defining what constitutes "acceptable evidence" of learning and how that evidence will be collected and measured.

It is important to note that "assessment" does not necessarily imply graded work, as formative assessments are integral in providing ongoing feedback. For consistency and alignment with adult learning theory best practices, this guide uses the term "assessment," though the term "evaluation" may also be used in different contexts.

Program Assessment

It will be important for programs to assess the effectiveness of their curriculum by collecting data from multiple sources to determine how well students are being prepared for real-world work in BHSS settings. This includes evaluating where students are starting, how they are performing midway through the program, and how they are progressing upon completion of courses. Summative assessments of competencies provide insights into students' proficiency, but additional data points are crucial for a more comprehensive view of program success. Feedback from practicum assessments and supervisors, as required by the Department of Health (DOH), helps to understand how students are applying their knowledge in real-world settings. Furthermore, interviews or surveys of recent graduates about their work experiences and how their BHSS education has translated into their professional roles, along with employer feedback on graduates' preparedness to exercise competencies in the workplace, can further inform program effectiveness. Programs may also consider any comprehensive exams required by the institution to assess overall learning outcomes.

This multi-faceted approach, part of a continuous quality improvement (QI) process, will help programs refine their curriculum and ensure students are adequately prepared to practice as BHSS providers. It is essential that each program creates its own assessment system to track success and drive ongoing improvements.

Sample Competency Assessments

As part of the approval process to offer a BHSS certificate, education programs will need to define how they will assess that a BHSS learner is proficient within the multiple DOH BHSS competency areas and provide them to the Washington DOH. For the purposes of this Educator's Guide, these are referred to these as "competency assessments." Within each meta-competency (and sometimes individual competencies), the BHSS Project Team's subject matter experts have provided ideas and examples for how a program could assess that a BHSS is proficient in this area at a bachelor-level and prepared for supervised clinical work. The key concepts and teaching points in each chapter, as well as any sample assessments and activities, support the learning development process toward the competency assessment for that competency.

These competency assessments are intended to be descriptive and provide context rather than prescriptive or limiting.

A Note About Key Teaching Points

Whereas learning objectives describe what students will be able to know/do, key teaching points describe what instructors will do in the classroom.

Assessment Best Practices

Assessments should be used as a scaffold to build toward the lecture, unit, or course's learning objectives. They can be broken into two categories that are described in more detail below: formative assessments, and summative assessments. Assessments should, when possible, represent real-world application of the learning objectives being assessed. The assessment resources and examples provided in each chapter of this Educator's Guide do not differentiate between formative and summative. Educators are strongly encouraged to reflect on and plan for how they will use both types of assessment in their activities and course syllabi to build toward the learning objectives a BHSS will need to demonstrate proficiency in.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessments are brief, in-time assessments that instructors use to elicit ongoing learner feedback. They are often also referred to as “learning activities” or “informal evaluation or assessments.” Formative assessments gather ongoing feedback in multiple ways to reveal what learners understand, where they struggle, and how they think. This feedback guides learners on where to focus and helps instructors quickly address issues and adjust their teaching. (Heritage, 2021, pp. 8). Formative assessments usually have little to no actual grade value since the goal is to monitor and improve the connection between teaching and learning (Eberly Center, n.d.; Fisher, n.d.).

The key to effectively using formative assessments is to focus on specific concepts or areas where data can provide clear answers with the fewest questions. This saves work for the instructor and avoids overwhelming students. Formative assessments build toward summative assessments, ensuring that ongoing evaluation aligns with the final measure of competency. For example, an instructor might need to assess whether learners understand a new concept before they apply it as a skill.

Examples of Formative Assessment

Spontaneous:

- Asking learners to raise hands if they feel they understand
- Q&A
- Observing learners during a small group activity

Planned:

- Short, ungraded quiz
- Classroom discussions
- Matching activities for key terms
- Self-assessments

“When the cook tastes the soup, that’s formative; when the guests taste the soup, that’s summative.”
Bob Stake (Scriven, 1991, p. 169)

Summative Assessment

Summative assessments are graded and often heavily weighted coursework that happens at the end of an instructional unit, chapter, or course. The goal of summative assessments is to provide a comprehensive measure of what learners know or don’t know that is tied to learning outcomes (Eberly Center, n.d.; Fisher, n.d.). Summative assessments should be an accumulation of what’s already been assessed formatively. A summative assessment shouldn’t be the first time that the knowledge, skill, or attitude is being assessed.

Examples of Summative Assessment

- Graded quizzes
- Unit tests
- Final projects
- Mid-quarter exams
- Reflection papers
- Essays

Choosing an Assessment

When choosing an assessment, instructors should ensure it is closely tied to the course, unit, and activity learning objectives. They should consider what specific evidence of learning is necessary to determine whether learners have achieved the intended outcomes. This could include a demonstration of applied knowledge, the ability to analyze complex concepts, or the synthesis of skills developed throughout the course or unit. Later in this chapter, a case example demonstrates how both formative and summative assessments can be integrated to support learning and track student progress.

Rubrics

As Feldman (2018) emphasizes, assessment and grading should be so clear that students always know where they stand and what they need to do to reach their learning goals. Rubrics make this transparency possible. Using a rubric helps to define and communicate the criteria for evaluating a learner's work, providing clear descriptions of the expectations of each criterion. Rubrics define the continuum of proficiency, from exemplary to developing, helping students track and improve their skills over time. They should directly reflect the learning outcomes of the assignment or course, motivate learners, and be mathematically accurate and bias-resistant (Feldman, 2018).

Types of Rubrics

Rubrics can vary in form and focus (Ragupathi & Lee, 2020). Scoring rubrics (or holistic rubrics) focus on assigning a summative score for the entire assignment, often without providing detailed feedback to the learner. Below is an example of a scoring rubric for a summative assessment.

Instructions for Creating Rubric Criteria

Step 1. Define objective being assessed

The specific knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed is defined, using a measurable verb.

Step 2. Define criteria for “developing proficiency”

The reason for recommending starting with “developing proficiency” is that it represents the observable behaviors that most students are expected to demonstrate by the end of a period of learning. This is where the observable or measurable outputs from the student's work are described, reflecting the specific knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed, as quantified by established criteria.

Step 3. Define remaining criteria.

After defining what “developing proficiency” looks like, it is recommended to define criteria that approach proficiency and exceed what would typically be expected from most students.

- “Needs work”: The observable or measurable outputs from the student's work reflect **little or no attempt(s) at demonstrating** the specific knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed.
- “Beginning”: The observable or measurable outputs from the student's work reflect **some attempt(s)** at demonstrating the specific knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed.
- “Proficient for a BHSS student”: The observable or measurable outputs from the student's work reflect **above and beyond what is expected for a BHSS student**, demonstrating the specific knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed. ***It's important to note that proficiency at this level may include errors in performance consistent with a novice professional helper. Proficiency for a BHSS student should not be equated to a post-bachelor or graduate level provider.***

Blank Rubric with Instructions: Summative Assessment

Skill being assessed	Criteria				Score	Comments
	1 Needs Work	2 Beginning	3 Developing Proficiency	4 Proficient (for a BHSS student)		
[Name the specific knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed.]	Define the observable or measurable outputs from the student's work that reflect:					
	<i>Little or no attempt(s) at demonstrating</i> the specific knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed.	<i>Some attempt(s)</i> at demonstrating the specific knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed.	<i>An adequate attempt</i> at demonstrating the knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed.	<i>Above and beyond what is expected for a BHSS student</i> in demonstrating the knowledge, skill, or attitude being assessed.	[Provide a numerical score based on the criteria category]	[Provide feedback to the student.]

Instructional rubrics (or analytic rubrics) assess individual elements of the learner's work and center the process rather than the final product. Andrade (2006) recommends using instructional rubrics to define learning objectives, shape teaching strategies, provide targeted guidance, and assess how effectively learners meet the intended outcomes. They are most often used with formative assessments, like the example below.

Blank Rubric with Instructions: Formative Assessment

Skill being assessed	Criteria				Comments
	Needs Work	Beginning	Developing Proficiency	Proficient (for a BHSS student)	
[Name the specific knowledge, skill or attitude being assessed.]	Define the observable or measurable outputs from the student's work that reflect:				
	The level of understanding or skill is well below what is expected ; recommend reviewing key concepts/skills	The level of understanding or skill is approaching expectations ; would benefit from some additional review.	The level of understanding or skill meets expectations ; ready to continue with further assignments,	The level of understanding or skill exceeds expectations for a BHSS student ; recommend modifying	[Provide feedback to the student.]

	with further time/activities.		depth/breadth of content.	assignments for added complexity.	
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Benefits of Using Rubrics

For Learners

Rubrics benefit learners by reducing ambiguity, fostering self-assessment, and providing actionable feedback. In contrast to the top-down model of traditional grading, where learners rely solely on the instructor's expertise and evaluative power, rubrics help learners to understand from the beginning how their work will be evaluated and what improvements are needed to gain proficiency and success in the course.

For Educators

Rubrics serve as powerful tools to scaffold learning, ensure consistency and objectivity in assessment and grading, and align assessment criteria with their learning objectives.

Rubrics and Equity

Equity in assessment and grading happens when all learners, regardless of age, ability, gender, sex, religion, race, or ethnicity, have equal access to the information they need to succeed. Rubrics promote this by making the instructor's expectations and criteria transparent and empowering learners to be part of the assessment process. All learners benefit from rubrics, and for learners who are first-generation, from minoritized gender, racial, and ethnic groups, non-native English speakers, and/or have learning disabilities, they are especially supportive. Rubrics ensure the instructor's assessment is based on objective criteria and clearly outlines assignment expectations, highlighting cultural and academic norms such as citation practices and discipline-specific terminology. Rubrics provide a structured and predictable framework, supporting task management by breaking down assignments into clear, manageable steps and providing clear language on the instructor's expectations to promote self-efficacy (Denning & Moody, 2013). This supports all learners and is especially helpful for students who are neurodiverse or have learning disabilities.

Rubrics ensure equity for all students by promoting fair grading practices and fostering communication between educators and support services (Stevens & Levi, 2005).

It is important to use grading rubrics consistently, particularly for qualitative assignments (e.g., final projects, essays, reflection papers).

Putting It All Together: Case Example

Learning Objectives

In a unit addressing harm reduction treatment, an instructor has the following learning objectives:

By the end of the unit, students will be able to:

- Contrast abstinence-based treatment, counseling, and harm reduction treatment (HaRT).
- Identify ways in which HaRT and other harm-reduction approaches can coexist with abstinence-based treatment.

Assessment Structure

The instructor has four planned assessment activities; the first three will be used as formative assessments, and the fourth will be used as a summative assessment.

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The instructor will use the formative assessments to gauge whether learners are on track to demonstrate proficiency of the unit's learning objectives and to identify areas where they may need further support before moving on. The summative assessment will be used by the instructor to assess the learners' overall comprehension of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes covered in the unit.

In addition to these planned assessments, the instructor will likely incorporate spontaneous assessments during the unit in the form of Q&As and observing learners during small group activities.

Assessment Activity #1 (formative; credit/no-credit; single-point rubric)

1. Learners write a paragraph describing the differences between abstinence-based approaches, counseling, and HaRT.
2. The instructor reads the paragraphs, making notes of any error themes, and has a quick debrief at the next class meeting to address any common misunderstandings. **NOTE: This is a quick assessment to check for students' understanding.**
3. The instructor grades the assessment as a credit/no-credit rather than a level of proficiency.

Rubric for Assessment Activity #1

Skill being assessed	Criteria				Comments
	Needs Work	Beginning	Developing Proficiency	Proficient (for a BHSS student)	
Define abstinence-based treatment, counseling, and harm reduction treatment (HaRT).	– Did not address the paragraph prompt.	– Paragraph addresses at least one of three key concepts. – Some understanding of the key concepts.	– Paragraph addresses at least two of three key concepts with somewhat appropriate level of detail. – Adequate understanding of the key concepts.	– Paragraph addresses all three key concepts with appropriate detail. – Thorough understanding of key concepts.	

Assessment Activity #2 (formative; credit/no-credit; single-point rubric)

1. Learners participate in a class panel to discuss ways that HaRT and abstinence-based treatment can both exist as viable treatment approaches.
2. The instructor moderates and answers questions as needed.
- The instructor completes a rubric for each student to give the student feedback and guidance, and determine where they (the instructor) may need to spend more time with students on a particular skill.
3. The instructor assigns a credit/no-credit grade based on completion rather than level of proficiency.

Rubric for Assessment Activity #2

Skill being assessed	Criteria				Comments
	Needs Work	Beginning	Developing Proficiency	Proficient (for a BHSS student)	
Identify ways in which HaRT and other harm-reduction approaches can coexist with abstinence-based treatment.	– Did not participate in the panel, whether verbally or in writing	– Some understanding of the discussion topic and minimal participation in the panel, whether verbally or in writing (i.e., at least one question OR one comment)	– Adequate understanding of the discussion topic and acceptable level of participation, whether verbally or in writing. (i.e., at least one question AND comment)	– Thorough understanding of discussion topic – Contributed to the panel discussion with thoughtful questions and/or comments, whether verbally or in writing	

Assessment Activity #3 (summative; graded, multi-point rubric)

1. In pairs, learners discuss an instructor-provided example script for introducing the rationale for HaRT to a patient and tailor the script according to a specific patient care setting (e.g., job placement setting).
2. Learners answer reflection questions about anticipated benefits and challenges or barriers in other setting types.
3. The learners submit the tailored script and reflection answers for the instructor to read and grade. **NOTE: This assessment represents students demonstrating their level of proficiency.**
4. The instructor assigns a grade based on the numerical score in the rubric (see example rubric below).

Rubric for Assessment Activity #3

Skill being assessed	Criteria				Score	Comments
	1 Needs Work	2 Beginning	3 Developing Proficiency	4 Proficient (for a BHSS student)		
Tailor a script to different patient care settings.	– Did not participate/ did not follow instructions	– Some understanding of making changes to a script based on different patient care settings	– Adequate understanding of making changes to a script based on different patient settings	– Thorough understanding of making changes to a script based on different patient settings		
Reflect on benefits and	– Did not participate/	– Some understanding	– Adequate understanding	– Thorough understanding		

challenges or barriers in other setting types.	did not follow instructions	of benefits, challenges, and barriers – Reflection paragraph is lacking sufficient details	of benefits, challenges, and barriers – Acceptable details provided in reflection paragraph	of benefits, challenges, and barriers – Able to provide two or more examples with sufficient details for each		
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Assessment Activity #4 (summative; graded, multi-point rubric)

- Learners examine a case study of a clinical setting that is interested in providing harm-reduction approaches in addition to their current abstinence-based treatment approaches.
- Learners write an essay that demonstrates their understanding of the case study by contrasting abstinence-based treatment, counseling, and HaRT approaches as options for the example clinical setting and recommending ways in which HaRT and other harm-reduction strategies can coexist with abstinence-based treatment approaches at this example clinic.
- The learners submit the essay for the instructor to read and grade. **NOTE: This assessment represents students demonstrating their level of proficiency.**
- The instructor assigns a grade based on the numerical score in the rubric (see example rubric below).

Rubric for Assessment Activity #4

Skill being assessed	Criteria				Score	Comments
	1 Needs Work	2 Beginning	3 Developing Proficiency	4 Proficient (for a BHSS student)		
Contrast abstinence-based treatment, counseling, and HaRT.	– Did not follow instructions	– Some ability to contrast the key concepts – Essay addresses at least one of three key concepts	– Adequate understanding of contrasting the key concepts – Essay addresses at least two of three key concepts with somewhat appropriate level of detail	– Thorough understanding of key concepts and ability to contrast them – Essay addresses all three key concepts with appropriate detail		
Identify ways in which HaRT and other harm-reduction approaches can coexist with abstinence-based treatment.	– Did not follow instructions	– Some understanding of making recommendations – Essay addresses at least one of example with basic level of detail	– Adequate understanding of make recommendations – Essay addresses at least two examples with appropriate level of detail	– Thorough understanding of making recommendations – Essay addresses all three examples with rich detail		

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