

Introduction

Are you up to the "task" of incorporating challenging performance tasks into your curriculum? Look no further! **Performance Tasks** gives opportunities for individuals, partners, and teams of students.

According to McTighe and Wiggins (sources: McTighe, J. and Wiggins, G. *The Understanding by Design Handbook*, ASCD; Alexandria, VA, 1999 and McTighe, J. and Wiggins, G. *Understanding by Design Professional Development Workbook*, ASCD; Alexandria, VA, 2004 and McTighe, J. and Wiggins, G. *Understanding by Design*, ASCD; Alexandria, VA, 2005), it is best to start your planning with the end in mind. Why incorporate backward design? As teachers, we're used to jumping to lesson and activity ideas before clarifying our performance goals for students. By thinking through the assessments upfront, we ensure greater alignment of our goals, objectives, and standards, and we also focus our teaching on the desired results. Understanding by Design (UbD) is an essential framework for the development of high quality curriculum, including performance tasks.

When you incorporate performance tasks, you help your students create meaningful work by using a direct connection between curriculum and instruction and student performance. Ask yourself: *"What does it mean for my scholars to understand this objective in ways that are relevant, are authentic, and gives them power as active learners?"* Lessons and units should be derived from the results that you want from the students, not from the methods, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable teaching. Too often the focus is on the **teaching** and not the **learning**. You must have a clear understanding of where you are headed before designing learning opportunities. Using performance tasks also allows for better opportunities for differentiated instruction.

The Definition of a Performance Task

- A *performance task* is an assessment based on authentic tasks such as activities, exercises, or problems that require students to show what they can do and are used to determine student progress. A performance task gives the scholar the opportunity to illustrate, perform, or demonstrate what they know, understand, and can do.
- Performance tasks are designed to have students demonstrate their understanding by applying their knowledge to a particular situation.
- Performance tasks often have more than one acceptable solution; they may call for a student to create a response to a problem and then explain or defend it. The process involves the use of higher-order thinking skills such as cause and effect, analysis, deductive or inductive reasoning, experimentation, and problem solving. Performance tasks may be used primarily for assessment at the end of a period of instruction, but are frequently used for learning as well as assessment.

(Source: Adapted from *The Language of Learning: A Guide to Education Terms*, by J. L. McBrien & R. S. Brandt, pp. 77-78, 1997, Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.)