

Resource Guide

Culturally Responsive Assessment

Your assessments may be informal, diagnostic assessments that seek to understand current knowledge levels, formative assessments that promote practice, or summative assessments that seek to evaluate a product of learning (e.g., a paper or project). When creating assessment prompts, you might imagine how you would react to the prompt, ensuring you'd have a clear understanding if you were the student.

Your students' expectations and assumptions regarding academic work will vary depending on their experiences: where they grew up, early educational experiences, courses they have already taken, etc. These factors represent the unique cultural lens through which each student interacts with course content, and it may differ from your own. These individual cultural differences can be the source of accidental miscommunications between instructor and student. Here are a few steps you can take to be more responsive to these cultural differences.

*See [this resource guide](#) for considerations when planning inclusive assignments.

- **State Expectations for Level of Formality**
 - Students, especially those from cultures that emphasize formality in the classroom, may be hesitant to respond in ways that are more informal or conversational. For example, imagine you have a discussion prompt inviting students to share an example of an experience that relates to a course topic. Should this be carefully cited and formally presented or conversational, with an expectation of a more informal tone? Unless you make these expectations explicit, with a potential example, you are likely to receive responses that vary wildly in their degree of formality and effort due to cultural expectations.
- **Be Clear About Intended Audience**
 - "This is to help me understand what knowledge you are bringing to the class." "Imagine you are writing to an expert audience, who will not need common terms in this field defined." "Create a presentation meant to be shared with an elementary school classroom." The intended audience for assessments may not always be clear and, unless you explain, students may make different assumptions based on their cultural and experience-derived expectations. Many may assume you, the instructor, are the expected audience and imagine they do not need to carefully define terms or avoid assumptions due to your expertise.
- **Recognize Your Academic Discipline's Culture**
 - It can be easy to overlook the influence of academic disciplinary culture on the classroom. For example, what a "scholarly article" means may be different in different disciplines. Should writing be from the first-person perspective? Are

there terms with discipline-specific meaning that may cause confusion? This is especially relevant when teaching courses that invite enrollment from students across many disciplines. Try to remember to point out assumed knowledge inherent in your discipline and you can help students learn about the culture of your field while improving their assessment performance.

- **Decide When to Give Feedback vs. When to Grade**
 - Imagine a course with a focus on understanding how to formally test research questions in a specific field. While the course might be writing intensive, the quality of students' grammar is unlikely to be a primary learning outcome. So, should grammar be part of the grade? Situations like these are opportunities to ask yourself what truly reflects the learning goals of your course. Individuals from different cultures may have different levels of comfort with English and "written accents," or distinct ways of framing thoughts in writing. The power of non-graded feedback can help students improve their writing and help them recognize the writing expectations in your field. Pointing out errors, without correcting them, can be especially helpful in encouraging students to improve as writers.

Resources

Chavez, A. & Longerbeam, S. (2016). *Teaching Across Cultural Strengths*. Stylus Publishing.

Shapiro, S., Farrelly, R. & Tomas, Z. (2023). *Fostering international student success in higher education* (2nd Ed). TESOL International Association and HAFSA.

For more information or to discuss how you might incorporate these ideas into your courses, contact the Reinert Center by [email](#).