Assessment Foundations

Evidence-based assessment

Contemporary assessment practice is about collecting evidence about a candidate's skills and knowledge and making a judgement about whether or not the candidate has met the requirements according to the standards in the unit(s) of competency, drawn from a national Training Package. The assessor can use a range of methods for collecting the evidence, and not every candidate needs to present the same types of evidence.

Meeting the requirements of the unit usually means students demonstrating that they have the skills and knowledge to perform the work tasks competently in a workplace setting. For this reason, Training Package advice about assessment places emphasis on evidence of performance in a workplace. For example, the Tourism, Hospitality and Events Training Package (SIT12) states:

“Industry highly values graduates who are ready to work in their businesses because they have been exposed to industry conditions. The tourism, travel and hospitality industries strongly encourage practical assessment of skills and knowledge in the workplace and on-the-job mentoring and coaching” SIT12, P121

In the absence of a workplace from which evidence can be collected, assessors need to create evidence gathering activities that are “industry realistic”. Observation of students performing in a simulated workplace environment can provide evidence to enable the assessor to make an assessment decision with confidence. More: Finding evidence of workplace performance (in About Assessment > Resources).

Not all candidates will take the same time to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to be deemed competent. But ultimately, the assessor needs to be able to make a judgement with confidence, based on the evidence collected and presented, about whether or not the candidate has met the requirements of the unit(s).

Definition of Competence

From the ASQA Glossary (website) of VET terms:

“Competence is the consistent application of knowledge and skill to the standard of performance required in the workplace. It embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments.”

Competence covers all aspects of workplace performance. These are described in the dimensions of competence, which are part of the broad concept of competency, which includes all aspects of work performance as represented by task skills, task management skills, contingency management skills and job/role environment skills, as follows:

1. Task Skills – performance of the tasks to workplace standard. These are the practical skills the student must do and are often the easiest to identify.
2. Task Management Skills – planning and co-ordinating a number of different activities to complete a work task. They are required at all AQF levels. Traditional TAFE assessment methods may not assess these skills; incorporating them better reflects real work activities.
3. **Contingency Management Skills** – how the candidate responds when things don’t go to plan. This is another ‘real workplace’ skill that needs to be assessed; perhaps using a scenario or questions that asks ‘What would you do if...?’.

4. **Job/Role Environment Skills** – dealing with workplace expectations such as interruptions or distractions.

Find more information about this in *Visualising Competence*. (in About Assessment – Resources)

**Holistic work-real assessment**

Training Package units of competency are designed to reflect job functions and tasks undertaken in workplaces. One unit may relate to a particular work task. Work-real assessments can provide direct evidence of a student’s skills and knowledge against the requirements of the units, and can make it easier for an assessor to make an assessment decision with confidence.

Rarely do work activities relate to a single unit of competency - usually multiple units are required to accurately reflect the reality of work. Holistic or integrated assessment means an approach to assessment that covers the clustering of multiple units or elements to make the assessment more closely match real workplace activity. The units clustered together should be a natural grouping that reflects skills and knowledge implemented at work.

Holistic assessment has some challenges - the assessor needs to ensure that all requirements from each unit are addressed and that the outcome for each unit is carefully recorded. An assessment outcome is recorded for each unit, even if multiple units are being assessed together in one assessment event. And within an integrated assessment event covering multiple units, the assessor may decide that a candidate is competent in some units and not yet competent in others.

When designing an assessment strategy, look for ways to collect evidence of a student’s performance in the workplace. If you can’t be there to observe them, think about other ways of collecting evidence of their performance, for example a video recording uploaded to a website, work products or documents, a supervisor’s report, evidence from a project that they have undertaken, photos or a digital story that depicts their work activity.

For more information see:
- Developing Workplace Assessment Tools (in About Assessment > Resources) – This guide shows how to cluster units and develop a holistic assessment related to “whole-of-job” activities in the food manufacturing industry. This model would apply to other industry areas.

**Principles of Assessment and Rules of Evidence**

The principles of assessment state that assessment tools and processes must meet the following requirements. These principles are incorporated into the [Standards for RTOs 2015](#) (website) Standard 1.8 and are reproduced here:

- **Fairness**
  The individual learner’s needs are considered in the assessment process. Where appropriate, reasonable adjustments are applied by the RTO to take into account the individual learner’s needs. The RTO informs the learner about the assessment process, and provides the learner with the opportunity to challenge the result of the assessment and be reassessed if necessary.

- **Flexibility**
  Assessment is flexible to the individual learner by:
  - reflecting the learner’s needs;
  - assessing competencies held by the learner no matter how or where they have been acquired; and
drawing from a range of assessment methods and using those that are appropriate to the context, the unit of competency and associated assessment requirements, and the individual.

- **Validity**
  Any assessment decision of the RTO is justified, based on the evidence of performance of the individual learner. Validity requires:
  - assessment against the unit(s) of competency and the associated assessment requirements covers the broad range of skills and knowledge that are essential to competent performance;
  - assessment of knowledge and skills is integrated with their practical application;
  - assessment to be based on evidence that demonstrates that a learner could demonstrate these skills and knowledge in other similar situations; and
  - judgment of competence is based on evidence of learner performance that is aligned to the unit/s of competency and associated assessment requirements.

- **Reliability**
  Evidence presented for assessment is consistently interpreted and assessment results are comparable irrespective of the assessor conducting the assessment.

*The rules of evidence* relate to the principles of assessment and provide guidance about the collection of evidence for assessment. These rules are also incorporated in the [Standards for RTOs 2015](https://www.gov.au) (website). Well-designed assessment tools and processes will collect evidence that complies with:

- **Validity**
  The assessor is assured that the learner has the skills, knowledge and attributes as described in the module or unit of competency and associated assessment requirements.

- **Sufficiency**
  The assessor is assured that the quality, quantity and relevance of the assessment evidence enables a judgment to be made of a learner’s competency.

- **Authenticity**
  The assessor is assured that the evidence presented for assessment is the learner’s own work.

- **Currency**
  The assessor is assured that the assessment evidence demonstrates current competency. This requires the assessment evidence to be from the present or the very recent past.

**Foundation Skills** *(from Government Skills Australia website)*

Foundation skills are those core or essential skills we need to engage successfully in work and life. The term ‘Foundation Skills’ is currently used to include the core skills defined in the [Australian Core Skills Framework](https://www.gov.au) (ACSF) (website) as well as the employability skills identified by employers as critical for effective performance in the workplace. The core skills of the ACSF include reading, writing, oral communication, numeracy and learning. ‘Employability skills’ now come under a new framework called [Core Skills for Work](https://www.gov.au) (CfW) (website) and incorporate skills such as problem solving, teamwork and digital literacy.

Although foundation skills are viewed as those that underpin vocational learning and skills development, they should not be interpreted as only low-level or single-level skills. There is a growing recognition that foundation skills range from quite basic, entry-level skills to very specialised or high-level skills. People are constantly challenged when trying to understand new forms of communication and information as they take on different roles throughout their personal and working life.
Industry engagement

The advent of Training Packages introduced an obligation on RTOs to engage with industry in the preparation of their delivery and assessment strategies, and the development and validation of assessment tools. This obligation has been strengthened in the new Standards for RTOs (2015) where Clause 1.5 and 1.6 state:

1.5 The RTO’s training and assessment practices are relevant to the needs of industry and informed by industry engagement.

1.6 The RTO implements a range of strategies for industry engagement and systematically uses the outcome of that industry engagement to ensure the industry relevance of:
   a. its training and assessment strategies, practices and resources; and
   b. the current industry skills of its trainers and assessors.

The Users’ Guide to the Standards (pdf – 2.53MB) sets a high bar for industry engagement. Under the guide to compliance it states that “RTOs must be able to demonstrate that all strategies for training and assessment have been developed in response to information obtained through engaging with industry stakeholders”.

Specifically, “You must be able to demonstrate that industry representatives have had input into:

- the skills and knowledge you require trainers and assessors to hold, and
- the resources your RTO uses for training and assessment

RTOs must retain evidence of this engagement. The guide warns against “taking shortcuts - like developing a generic strategy from a template and asking an employer to sign off”.

Teaching sections will use different strategies to meet this requirement in an effective way, including:

- Inviting an industry/enterprise person to participate in a section meeting to discuss delivery and assessment strategies
- Visiting an enterprise to trial a new assessment tool and seeking feedback from employers
- Inviting industry / enterprise representatives to participate in a formal assessment validation session
- Get students to undertake workplace projects or specific workplace activities, and ask their employer/supervisor to “sponsor” this work, by providing ongoing support and assistance. The employer supervisor can be asked for feedback about these assessment activities.
- Use ePortfolios for students to upload assessment evidence, and give employers or workplace supervisors access to this information. Again, the employer/supervisor can provide feedback about the assessment activities.

For more information see Industry Engagement Strategies in About Assessment > Resources

Interested in more?

View the Resources tab in About Assessment for links to assessment checklists, readings and resources on a wide range of assessment topics.