

# Introduction

**We have written** *Linking Assignments to Assessments: A Guide for Teachers* with the goal to make assessment accessible and practical. While assessment should be part of every classroom, many teachers feel they are not “good at assessment.” This book helps address teachers’ concerns by impressing upon readers the idea that no teacher creates any activity without assessment in the background—that is, when teachers create activities for their students, they consider the kinds of information that will result from that activity. We also invite teachers to consider how that information will inform their teaching and what it can reveal about their students’ abilities and language proficiencies. In keeping with that stance, this textbook provides ideas for assignments with accompanying information on how to develop rubrics and other assessment tools for assignments, showing the inextricable link between the activity and the assessment and that, in fact, they are actually one and the same.

This text has been primarily designed for a few different audiences. The first is teachers who are training to get their master’s in TESOL programs (or earning TEFL certificates) who hope to work in dedicated ESL classrooms in U.S. PreK–12 schools or teach in intensive English programs (IEPs) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs at the university level or in another type of language school. Another audience is future PreK–12 teachers who will face a growing number of English learners (ELs) in their classrooms. The book will also be useful to any practicing instructor who has had little or no preparation to work with ELs, sparse knowledge about language assessment (and quite possibly assessment in general) and language acquisition, and little time to acquire that knowledge, even though assessment knowledge remains one of the keys to successful classroom practice. Both new and experienced teachers will appreciate the book’s practicality, its guidance in developing assessment skills and strategies, acquiring assessment literacy, and enhancing student learning.

## What’s in This Book?

*Linking Assignments to Assessments: A Guide for Teachers*, which strives to transform teaching and learning, combines foundational information about assessment practices

and incorporates extensive step-by-step instructions for teachers to effectively integrate assessment into their classrooms.

Chapter 1 begins by explaining what assessment literacy is and why it is important, especially for teachers working with ELs. We contextualize this in broader political/social contexts of achievement gaps and explain how focused instruction and assessment can help teachers help students make gains in the classroom. We then provide accessible introductions to commonly used principles in assessment.

Chapter 2 reviews the basics of what we know about language acquisition. We show how this knowledge illustrates how teachers need to have patience in the way they assess their ELs or former ELs, helping them build proficiency while not overly penalizing them because of unrealistic expectations. This chapter is included because many teachers do not realize how long it takes students to learn another language, especially in terms of academic proficiency.

Chapter 3 begins by emphasizing the importance of considering context and student backgrounds in effective assessment, which means that teachers will work with their students to meet national standards in different ways as they craft outcomes that may be unique to their classroom, region, and individual students. We then discuss ways to develop goals and learning outcomes for the class, explaining how teachers can develop their own or understand/analyze standards such as those provided by states and organizations.

Chapter 4 then focuses on the key steps of creating effective assessments, including understanding test specifications, writing directions, writing items, creating rubrics, and establishing accommodations. We discuss the differences in how these elements are considered in creating everyday formative assessments as well as more formal summative assessments like tests. In the last part of the chapter, we bring all these considerations together and walk through the process of creating a test.

Chapter 5 begins by defining what we mean by receptive skills: **listening and reading**. The chapter is then divided into two main sections, listening assessments and reading assessments. These sections are organized in similar ways. After giving background on the skill area being assessed, we discuss examples of relevant language standards that reference the skill. We then explore different ways to assess the skill (e.g., controlled, guided, and free—communicative practice—activities) and illustrate the assessment possibilities by sharing a variety of activities and ways to assess them, including sample rubrics.

Chapters 6 and 7 are similarly structured, with the former focusing on productive skills (**speaking and writing**) and the latter focusing on **grammar and vocabulary** assessment.

Even though this is a textbook aimed at the classroom, teachers need to know about standardized testing since it plays an important role in the academic lives of ELs at all different levels, whether they are taking a state test to graduate from high school or taking the TOEFL® to enter a program of study at a U.S. university. In Chapter 8, we point out some of the problems with standardized testing while providing an overview of what teachers need to know about it, including how to interpret scores and how to teach test-taking strategies that help students perform better.

Chapter 9 leads teachers through the process of articulating their ideas, knowledge, and values surrounding assessment and incorporating them in a philosophy that will shape the work they do. We explain the importance of the theory-practice link, summarizing some of the major approaches to assessment described earlier in the book. We provide examples of philosophies and activities around brainstorming the creation of an assessment philosophy.

## How to Use This Book

*Linking Assignments to Assessments: A Guide for Teachers* is intended to be read sequentially as each chapter builds on what has been previously discussed; however, some readers may prefer to jump to a particular section for a quick reference that helps address a problem they are facing in the classroom.

Each chapter ends with a selection of activities and discussion questions. While these are primarily intended for those reading the book in a classroom setting so that readers can engage more deeply with the text and discuss it with other learners, the activities and questions may also be useful for individual readers who want to reflect further on the material.

Both of us (Deborah and Todd) teach MA students. Deborah also teaches the required assessment course in both undergraduate and graduate TESOL programs. Her philosophy of assessment rides on the shoulders of her students and what she has learned from them about how, when, and why to assess.