

Qualities of “Authentic Performances”
(*Horace*, March 1990)

Structure and Logistics

- Are more appropriately public; involve an audience or panel.
- Do not rely on unrealistic and arbitrary time constraints.
- Offer known, not secret, questions or tasks.
- Are more like portfolios or a season of games, not one-shot.
- Require some collaboration with others.
- Recur—and are worth practicing for and retaking.
- Make assessment and feedback to students so central that school schedules, structures, and policies are modified to support them.

Intellectual Design Features

- Are “essential” – not needlessly intrusive, arbitrary, or designed to “shake out” a grade.
- Are “enabling” – constructed to point the student towards more sophisticated use of the skills or knowledge.
- Are contextualized, complex intellectual challenges, not “atomized” tasks corresponding to isolated “outcomes.”
- Involve the student’s own research or use of knowledge, for which “content” is a means.
- Assess student habits and repertoires, not mere recall or plug-in skills.
- Are representative challenges—designed to emphasize depth more than breadth.
- Are engaging and educational.
- Involve somewhat ambiguous tasks or problems.

Grading and Scoring Standards

- Involve criteria that assess essentials, not easily counted but relatively unimportant errors.
- Are graded not on a curve but in reference to performance standards (criterion-referenced, not norm-referenced).
- Involve demystified criteria of success that appear to students as inherent in successful activity.
- Make self-assessment a part of the assessment.
- Use a multifaceted scoring system instead of one aggregate grade.
- Exhibit harmony with shared schoolwide aims—a standard.

Fairness and Equity

- Ferret out and identify (perhaps hidden) strengths.
- Strike a constantly examined balance between honoring achievement and native skill or fortunate prior training.
- Minimize needless, unfair, and demoralizing comparisons.
- Allow appropriate room for student learning styles, aptitudes, and interests.
- Are attempted by all students, with the test “scaffolded up,” not “dumbed down,” as necessary.
- Reverse typical test-design procedures. A model task is first specified; then, a fair and reliable plan for scoring is devised.
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(provided by Grant Wiggins, former director of research at CES, with credit given to Ted Sizer, et al for some of these criteria)