



5 Grading and Assessment

Grading, like so much in education, is about our values. When I think about how best to grade the work students are doing in my classroom, I think about what I value most, the things that are essential for them to take away from their time with me. My answer to this question may very well be different from yours, and that's okay. You may also have school, district, or state mandates that impact the way you have to grade. This will all dictate how you use this section. The following pages lay out grading options that I use in my classes according to student need. First, though, I'll talk about assessment, which is different from and, in my mind, much more important than grading, because it involves how we interact and communicate with students about content. In my practice, I assess constantly and grade, or record my assessments in alphanumeric form, as little as possible. So read what's next and take it or leave it, viewing it all through the lens of your own values and classroom requirements.

The Three Elements of Assessment

When I assess student work, I'm looking for evidence that students have been learning and evidence about what they still need to learn to master content. This information, gained informally in observing students at work and in conversation, drives everything I do in the classroom, from knowing whether to re-teach a concept or to move on to the next thing, to recognizing when to sit down and work one-on-one with an individual student. The information I look for at each stage is different and connected to the learning goals of each stage. This sort of assessment is essential because of how it informs everything about how and what to do to support learning in your classroom.

Assessing Student Explorations

During the Exploration stage, student learning is focused on how to use media and processes in the classroom and how to apply that knowledge in self-directed work through the framework of ATP. The essential information I need to know is:

- Do students understand how to use the media and processes I've demonstrated?
- Can they apply that knowledge in their own work by making artistic choices?
- Are they learning and growing as artists?

These three key indicators are what each student needs to achieve, so that is what I pay attention to as I walk around the classroom. Because I have large classes and limited time, using this checklist helps me be strategic on where I spend my time. I print a class list with a category for each indicator. I keep this sheet on a clipboard and make a check next to each student's name when I see or hear evidence. Much of this evidence is observable and very quick to assess, especially understanding of techniques and processes, as well as understanding new knowledge. Showing growth involves a comparison between practice and summative work, but work does not have to be finished to see the change.

Explorations Assessment List

Look for evidence of achievement in each area.
by Melissa Purtee

Understands Techniques & Processes

- **Observe:** Use of technique and process.
- **Ask:** How do you _____? Can student give a verbal explanation of the technique or process?

Applies new knowledge

- **Observe:** Use of new techniques or processes in summative work.
- **Ask:** How are you using what you learned about _____ (new media or process) to create this?

Shows growth

- **Observe:** Growth through technical improvement or new skills when comparing between the practice activities in the Exploration and the summative work.
- **Ask:** How have you grown as an artist during this Exploration? What can you do that is new or better than before?



When I do not see observable evidence, I move on to questioning. This is both an assessment and an intervention, as the questions give students an opportunity to show what they know as well as refocus them on learning goals. When a student is unable to show or verbally explain that she understands one of the three indicators, I know I need to re-teach the concept. This often involves sitting down with the student and doing a one-on-one demonstration, but it can also point to content that needs to be revisited with a larger group, even the whole class, if more students are unable to show understanding. When a few students are unable to show evidence of learning, that tells me they need help; but when many students are unable to show evidence of learning, I know I need to retool how I teach the concept.

Assessing Work with Themes

After students finish building foundational knowledge with the media, techniques, and the Artistic Thinking Process as introduced in Explorations, they are ready for the next step toward artistic independence: Themes. These are the essential questions for assessment:

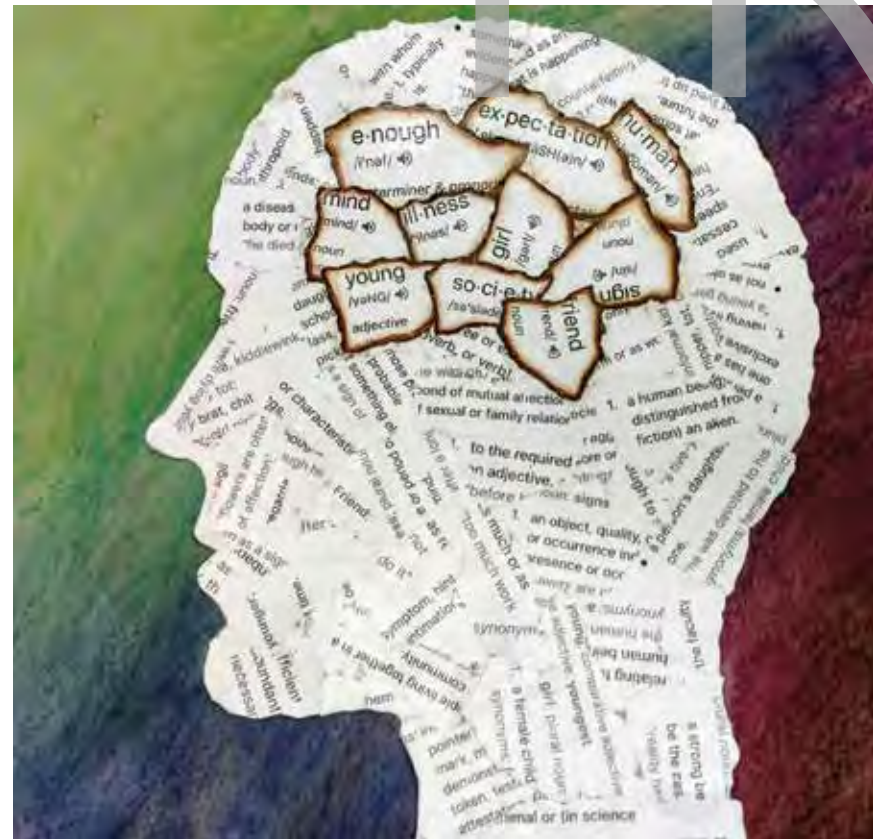
- Are students making intentional choices about media?
- Are students able to translate learning about media and process to increasingly independent work?
- Are students able to visually communicate the theme?
- Are students continuing to grow as artists?

When assessing in the Themes section, I'm considering four indicators: making choices, originality, communicating the theme, and artistic growth.

Making Choices

Here I'm looking to see if students can apply the knowledge that they learned in Explorations about media and techniques to communicate the theme at hand. Of course, this is not the students' first experience with making choices about media and process; I've been giving them choices between a selection of media all along. Still, the challenge of making choices about media on a broader scale is a real one, and kids can struggle with it, or get stuck on using a comfortable medium again and again. Because of this, it can be helpful to add a "media" column to the checklist you are using to assess and make note of the media students select. It can be fine to focus on a favorite medium, but often students get stuck on drawing, for example, because it's familiar and safe. I have students who do this who are much better with other forms of artmaking! I make sure to offer media alternatives and encourage them to take risks, because what I'd really like is for each learner to be able to pick media intentionally.

To assess making choices, look for the appropriateness of each student's media choice. I find this indicator is a good one to have a conversation with kids about. As I walk around the classroom during work time, I ask students



to explain why they selected the media they did. If they are unable to tell me, I know to have a longer conversation with them to figure out how I can help build their understanding. Do they know what media are available, or do I need to provide support to help them understand potential choices? Are they uninspired by the choices I've introduced? Maybe I need to connect them with something that will pique their interest or challenge them, which could be anything from oil paint to spray paint, but first I need to ask questions and really listen to make an informed, individualized decision about what sort of support to provide.

Originality

I look at the next indicator, originality, as a way to help me keep track of a conversation. I want to build my students' capacity to develop original ideas not only because it will make them better artists, but also because the ability to think creatively will make them better at whatever they choose to spend their lives doing. My goal is not to give poor grades to kids who rely on the crutch of copying, but to build each student's capacity to create original content. That means meeting everyone where they are and building capability incrementally. I use letter abbreviations that show where I see each student in regards to developing original ideas: C for copying an image directly, L for coping an image but making low-impact changes, and R for remixing or combining sources to make new content. The goal is to get each student to "R," which I do by teaching the concept of remixing early on in the course and by having conversations with students who struggle in that area. I help those students problem-solve how they can make content more original. I find that it is never helpful to forbid the replication of things like cartoon characters or anime, because too often it defeats those students. Instead, I use copying as a starting point to develop both the students' capacity for original work and a positive student-teacher relationship.

Communicating the Theme

The third indicator, communicating the theme, is straightforward and is well assessed through observation. When you look at student work, ideally you should be able to see visual communication about the theme. If you can't, assess students' understanding through conversation.

Showing Growth

Showing growth, the last indicator, is similar to the Exploration section. I look for growth in any of the following areas: technique, development of new skills, communication of original ideas, interpretation of themes, as well as making artistic choices about processes like selecting the appropriate media and techniques to bring an idea for artwork to fruition. Because student work is becoming more self-directed, the growth shown will look different

Themes Assessment List

Look for evidence of achievement in each area.
by Melissa Purtee

Making Choices

- **Observe:** Student selects appropriate media and processes for making art.
- **Ask:** How did you decide what media and techniques to use?

Originality

- **Observe:** Combining multiple sources of inspiration or using personally developed concepts to develop artwork.
- **Ask:** How is your idea original? Did you combine or mix sources of inspiration to come up with something new?

Communicates Theme

- **Observe:** Work interprets the theme visually.
- **Ask:** How is your work about the theme?

Shows Growth

- **Observe:** Growth through technical improvement, new skills, ability to develop/communicate original ideas, interpret themes, or make artistic choices about processes.
- **Ask:** How have you grown as an artist while working with this theme? What can you do that is new or better than before?

for each student: each student is making something different. Your room will look more and more like a functioning studio and less like a production line, with students using different materials and techniques, as well as all being in different places in the artistic process instead of moving along at a similar pace. It's important to know that all examples of growth will never be present for one student at the same time. Instead, look for the indicators over the timespan of the stage.

Assessing Student-Directed Work

They've made it! When my kids reach the point of Student-Directed Work, I always breathe a sigh of relief. Teaching becomes increasingly satisfying for me the more my students are able to take over responsibility for their work. It's wonderful to see students who were unsure and uncomfortable in the beginning working as confident artists. Hopefully, most of your students are now able to operate, for the most part, at the Established artist stage as they use the structure of ATP. However, they will all continue to need help and

support as they work with increased autonomy. The essential questions for doing assessments in this area include:

- Are students able to use the Artistic Thinking Process with increasing independence to find an idea, develop it, and create artwork they are proud of?
- Are students continuing to grow as artists?

To assess learning in Student-Directed Work, consider the following categories: making choices, finding and developing ideas, and showing growth.

Making Choices

Here, look to see if students are able to select media that communicates their artistic vision. This might be one medium or multiple. This is also a place where students can be challenged to find media that adds meaning to their work.

Finding and Developing Ideas

For finding and developing ideas, look to see if learners are able to find an original idea, then select appropriate development tasks to work out how to make the idea visual in the best way. This indicator is a good place to have a conversation about the student's intent in selecting development activities to make sure they are self-assessing their choices and picking strategies that are best for their goals and who they are as artists.

