

Using Final Performance Tasks to Assess Understanding

The Living in Christ series introduces another way of assessing whether students have understood the most important concepts in the unit: the final performance tasks. These can be used with a test or by themselves. You can also choose to disregard them.

Why Use a Final Performance Task?

Each unit of the course offers at least two final performance task options. These small projects were crafted to help the students to use the knowledge, skills, and understanding they gained throughout the unit in a way that could indicate their level of comprehension.

All teachers hope that their students will take what they have learned into the future, especially in a theology or religious studies class, because Catholicism is a lived faith. We believe that a final performance task can potentially “cement” the concepts of a unit for the student.

Brain research indicates that the more associations that learners can make with a piece of knowledge, a skill, or understanding, the more likely it is that they will store the material in their long-term memory. The experience many students have of cramming for tests and then forgetting all the material suggests that the process these students use when studying the material is more likely to put the knowledge, skills, and understanding in short-term memory without making it to long-term memory.

Though there is no guarantee that a final performance task will lead to long-term memory retention, the structure is more conducive to it. The tasks not only assess student learning but also promote it. Another benefit of using a final performance task (with or instead of a test) is that it gives students who do not test well an additional opportunity to show you their understanding in a medium that may better suit their learning styles and strengths.

The Desired Outcome of Final Performance Tasks

Completion of a final performance task should demonstrate the students’ understanding of the four major concepts or key understandings for the unit. The rubrics in the teacher guide (see the handout “Using Rubrics to Assess Work” [Document #: TX001012]) have been created to emphasize the four major concepts or understandings for the unit. You are free to change the rubric as you see necessary, of course, but the reason for the focus on the understandings rather than the spelling or other criteria is that the final performance task is a means for the students to indicate to you that they understand concepts. It is not simply an essay assignment to demonstrate writing skills.

Spelling, format, neatness, and other criteria are important, but they are not as important to us in developing the curriculum as having the students leave the class with a deep grasp of important concepts of our faith. This means that students who may struggle with organization or writing skills can succeed despite their obstacles.



Final Performance Tasks and Understanding

The final performance tasks in the teacher guide differ by unit. For example, unit 1 of the Living in Christ course The Bible: The Living Word of God provides two options; “Research and Write about a Genesis Story” and “Creatively Imitate Biblical Storytelling”. Brain research suggests that students become more invested in learning when they have some choice about what they will do.

These assignments ask the students to use biblical criticism skills yet also provide the students with guidance for doing so. By “doing” biblical criticism with their chosen passage and then addressing each bullet request, they demonstrate understanding of the four main concepts through their chosen story.

The assignments also include several of the facets of understanding (see the introduction to the teacher guide for a more in-depth explanation of these):

- *Explanation* The students explain how they have come to interpret a passage the way they have.
- *Interpretation* The students use interpretation to discern where God is revealed in the passage, how the story fits into salvation history, and to suggest the meaning of the passage for the people then and today.
- *Application* The students take knowledge and biblical exegesis skills that they learned in one situation and use it with these biblical passages.
- *Perspective* The students examine several points of view in this process. They read the literal story, do some exegetical work to discern what this may have said to the people to whom it was written, and then adapt this second interpretation to the modern day.
- *Empathy* Empathy is the ability to stand in another person’s shoes, to try and see from another person’s worldview or perspective. To anticipate the message that the biblical authors may have given their audience, the students must do more than intellectually evaluate the story and the times. They must also try to listen with the same mind and heart as these early listeners.
- *Self-knowledge* Self-knowledge has the students learn about themselves as they learn about all sorts of subjects. The students may have “aha!” moments about the material, such as “I never thought much about the people the biblical writers were writing to” or “I had to think differently about the modern day when applying a biblical passage to it.”

Though the students may still forget material from the unit, they will be sufficiently engaged in their passage to remember the key understandings.

Creating Your Own Final Performance Tasks

An important focus of this curriculum is to recognize that the teacher best knows his or her individual students. If you feel that other final performance tasks would better serve your students, we would encourage you to use them either alongside the options in the teacher guide or independently.



Resources

The following resources will teach you more about final performance tasks:

McTighe, Jay, and Grant Wiggins. *Understanding by Design*, Second edition. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2005. This book provides explanation, examples, and worksheet samples related to final performance tasks.

_____. *Understanding by Design Professional Development Workbook*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004. The accompanying workbook for the first edition provides summaries of the most important points and then also guides the reader step-by-step through the formation of final performance tasks.

McTighe, Jay, and Ken O'Connor. "Seven Practices for Effective Learning." *Best of Educational Leadership 2005–2006*, Summer 2006, Vol. 63, explains the role of final performance tasks in the overall teaching and learning process.

