Chapter Eight
Assessments and Program Review

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Important of Assessments

Assessments in the post-summer program are used for the same purpose as in a face-to-face program: to improve student performance by providing opportunities to practice and demonstrate learning through a variety of assessment formats. Assessments are also used to determine weaknesses and strengths and to provide personalized lesson plans for individual students. Finally, data collected from PBAs can be used to determine the benefits of having a summer only versus summer-plus-post-summer STARTALK program.

Online assessments can take the place of either formative or summative evaluations, either in real-time or as asynchronous assignments. Online assessments, like their face-to-face counterparts, should remain focused on authentic, everyday situations to determine how well students perform language tasks in all modalities and modes of communication (interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational) while demonstrating linguistic accuracy and social and cultural appropriateness.

Data from proficiency assessments are invaluable in informing instruction and establishing student learning records to mark their proficiency progression. Assessments should be regularly added to the student learning profile (see Chapter Six for more information) for instructor and program analysis over time. Assessments should be able to measure each modality independently so proficiency targets can be adjusted accordingly. Instructional time can also be redistributed as needed, with more time and activities focused on weaknesses and less on strengths.

Asynchronous Assessments

The nature of the STARTALK post-summer course design provides for synchronous online sessions as well as asynchronous assignments. These assignments give students opportunities to complete interpretive reading and listening tasks, as well as spoken and written presentational tasks, on their own time. By incorporating the same teaching principles and providing students with authentic content and contexts, learners will have the ability to receive feedback that they can incorporate into their live sessions. Tasks can take the form of writing letters to a pen pal, leaving a voice message in response to a question, or answering simple questions based on a passage.

Other kinds of self-assessments, such as journaling and learner reflections, are useful in encouraging students to think about what they have achieved and what they still want to know. Journaling can give particular insight into a student’s interests and help with designing individual lesson plans. Learner reflections are important check-ins that tell us what a student finds to be effective or ineffective – which can also aid in overall assignment design and teaching strategies.

A noted problem with online courses is the low level of participation and even attrition due to a feeling of isolation and a lack of accountability. Integrating outcomes of asynchronous assignments with live session learning goals can mitigate this feeling and provide motivation for students to dutifully complete all tasks. Although it is more work for the instructor, individualized feedback on asynchronous assignments also assigns importance to such tasks and encourages students to complete all parts of the program.

Frequency of Assessments

A proficiency assessment should be conducted at the end of the summer session, to be shared with the program director, coordinator, and teachers to determine an appropriate post-summer course of study. Even if instructors change between the summer and post-summer sessions, students will still have a sense of continuity based on their performance and the consistent program design. Formative assessments should take place regularly throughout the term, as these have been shown to improve student learning by allowing
students to track their own level of proficiency and set their own learning goals.

At the end of each module of instruction, students should be asked to complete a PBA through a role-play of each module’s target task. For example, students should be able to successfully order food at a restaurant or negotiate buying a cell phone. Most role-plays will take place using a synchronous online classroom and should be scored using a criterion-referenced rubric (click here to view an example) listing all the possible subtasks of each target task, determined by analyzing multiple examples of genuine target discourse. The results of the PBA should be shared with students shortly after the assessment so they know which areas were satisfactory and which areas need improvement.

In order to stay connected to students and create a sense of community, it is recommended that one face-to-face session be held midway through the semester to provide an opportunity for a role-playing assessment and to determine progress on learning goals. The last PBA of the term should be a summative assessment involving all of the skills practiced in the post-summer term. Finally, it is important to include a comprehensive proficiency test at the conclusion of the online sessions to determine if students improved, maintained, or decreased their language level as compared to the end of summer session.

Program Performance Analysis

The first iteration of a post-summer program will likely have issues to work through and require feedback from program participants. It is recommended that surveys be given at regular intervals to gather the opinions of students and instructors. These inquiries serve as important mechanisms to identify and adjust problem areas, such as curriculum design, technical issues, and scheduling problems. Similarly, a survey should be conducted at the end of the program to determine overall impressions of students and their parents and to solicit suggestions for future improvements.

At the conclusion of the post-summer term, the program administration and faculty should sift through the assessment data collected throughout the semester to determine overall successes and areas in need of improvement. Notably, the summative proficiency assessment from the end of the summer term should be compared to the summative proficiency assessment at the end of the post-summer term to determine improvements in student language skills, if any. These statistics should be stored so as to compare results from year to year, as well as to inform other STARTALK programs.

Assessing K-2 Learners

K-2 students provide a unique challenge in acquiring measurable assessment results. Nothing is currently commercially available to assess K-2 learners, as children this young are only capable of achieving a low level of proficiency. Instructors cannot entice verbal, self-created responses, so the purpose of assessments is to see interpretive skills rather than productive skills. When these kinds of assessments are conducted, teachers cannot assess K-2 students as a group, but as individuals or two to three students at most. Encouragement and positive feedback should be given to these learners at all times. Teachers should also not give up on K-2 learners even if immediate progress is not shown because games, activities, and stories can still have a positive, lasting impact. Here’s a sample of K-2 progress report that was shared with parents.

Tools for Summative Online Assessment

At the end of each respective term an overall proficiency assessment must be conducted. These tests target all modalities and can be used as official ratings. It is recommended that teachers review the kinds of questions and scenarios students will likely encounter. Additionally, students should be encouraged to demonstrate their full potential, and not give up early or abandon a test, in order to provide a ratable language sample. The following three types of assessments are available for your consideration.
1. **LinguaFolio** is a free online language-learning portfolio that promotes autonomous learning through formative assessment. LinguaFolio Online is organized around the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements and supports articulation by providing a clear and commonly accepted description of language proficiency based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines. Learners have the ability to set goals based on the Can-Do Statements, track their progress toward accomplishing the statements, and upload work samples to showcase their abilities. Learners are enabled to truly understand the differing levels of language proficiency through examining and practicing the language functions embodied by the Can-Do Statements. They can create evidence to include in their portfolios on a regular basis to showcase their work, which helps them see how they are building the capacity to use the target language. Learners thus have a clear voice in tailoring their learning experiences to their own needs, wants, and interests.

2. **STAMP (Standards-based Measurement of Proficiency)** is an online test that determines what students can do with the language based on reading, listening, writing, and speaking. This multiple-choice computer test is adaptive, which means it changes the difficulty of the questions based on the number of correct answers. This gives it the ability to provide a more accurate proficiency rating. Students receive a rating from 1-6, which corresponds to the ACTFL proficiency levels of novice-low through pre-advanced. The STAMP exam is content-based and tests one’s ability to understand main ideas from passages and recordings. There are no formal study guides, but the performance-style questions align with the STARTALK Principles and ACTFL World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. STAMP tests are offered by Avant Assessment. It takes about two hours to complete a STAMP test. For younger students, it may be necessary to break the tests into two days so that they do not become overtired. For more information about scheduling and costs, visit the [STAMP Assessment website](#).

There are two kinds of STAMP assessments offered: the STAMP 4S assessment and the STAMP 4Se assessment. The STAMP 4S assessment is geared for students in Grades 7 and beyond, and assesses a student’s language proficiency all the way to the top of the Advanced level. The STAMP 4Se is for students in Grades 2-6, and assesses a student’s language proficiency to the top of the Intermediate level. In the Flagship K-12 Blended Learning Pilot Program, students in Grades 3-8 take the STAMP 4Se assessment whereas students in the Grades 9-12 take the STAMP 4S assessment.

[STAMP 4S Sample Test Link](#)  
[STAMP 4Se Sample Test Link](#)

3. **AAPPL (ACTFL Assessment of Performance towards Proficiency in Languages)** is an exam that addresses the ACTFL World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. Test takers perform tasks such as participating in a virtual video chat, creating wikis, e-mailing, and using apps to demonstrate language ability. The exam specifically addresses interpersonal speaking and listening, presentational writing, and interpretive reading and listening. Tests are online and require a working camera and microphone. For more information about scheduling and costs, visit the [AAPPL website](#).