

Section 4:

Assessment Within GED as Project

A Definition Of Assessment

For the purposes of this guide, we adopt Wiggins & McTighe's definition of assessment, from their book *Understanding by Design* (1998):

By assessment, we mean the act of determining the extent to which the curricular goals are being and have been achieved. Assessment is an umbrella term we use to mean the deliberate use of many methods to gather evidence to indicate that students are meeting standards. (Page 4)

And what is the overall curricular goal but the passing of the GED? The *GED as Project* approach fits Wiggins & McTighe's concept of backward design. This means designing instruction with the end-goal in mind from the beginning, and then determining acceptable evidence that the student is learning and understanding. The final stage is to plan learning experiences and instruction.

This design process requires instructors to think like assessors, not just as activity designers. Instructors can in this way assess learning and check for understanding as the learners progress. Wiggins & McTighe's definition of understanding is multi-faceted, and includes such higher order thinking skills as being able to explain, interpret, apply, have perspective on an issue, empathize, and have self-knowledge. These skills all play an important part in passing the GED 2002. This is an on-going assessment, using both formal and informal methods.

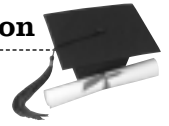
Assessment Methods In The Guide

GED as Project provides special Learning Projects that act as pre- and on-going assessments fitting the definitions and design approaches previously discussed. The first two are called "The GED and You" and the "The GED and You Revisited." Both encourage discovery and independence in the learner and check progress in a style consistent with content-based Learning Projects. Because the "The GED and You Revisited" checks progress in what the learner believes he/she has accomplished and gives an opportunity to update the Action Plan for learning, it is important to weave this learning project into the course of study several times. Each subject area has its own introductory Learning Project. For example, "GED Math and You" requires the students to take the Math Practice Test and then asks them to evaluate how they feel about math, determine what they know and do not know about math, and develop their plan for study. This process adds a depth of assessment that standardized tests cannot provide. All of these Learning Projects are written to reinforce the inquiry learning style, while providing progress checks for both you and your learners.

Another tool this guide provides is the individual Action Plan that learners develop at the end of "The GED and You" to plan their learning, for both their own as well as the instructor's, information. It is simple and direct, and can be revised and revisited as necessary to fit the instructor's and learners' needs.

The guide also suggests that learners collect a GED learning portfolio as they proceed through the content area Inquiry Activities. These provide a track record for both learner and instructor, as well as a reference for practice and further study.

Finally, we encourage instructors to use any other means of observational or written assessments that fit their class needs, as well as their personal instructional styles. Often, this takes the form of what we call Just-in-Time (or JIT) assessments. These are largely observational quick checks that occur naturally in the instructional process. Each instructor has his/her own style of doing this, from peering over shoulders during individual work time, to checking learning and understanding while observing group activities or engaging in individual progress checks. A JIT assessment leads to quick, helpful interventions such as Burst Lectures, one-on-one assistance, or a quick digression to lay some foundation or



straighten out a misunderstanding. These methods are intended to get learners on their way to inquiry learning again, either individually or as a group.

Intake Assessment

For the purposes of this guide, we will assume that the learners have been tested with a standardized test at intake before they begin study. In Virginia, this is usually a formal assessment, such as TABE, BEST, CASAS, accepted by the National Reporting System for federal record-keeping. When programs use item analyses or diagnostics in addition to these tests, the results can be useful in planning instruction and, to some degree, in progress evaluation. (For Item Analyses based on the TABE tests, contact the Virginia Adult Learning Resource Center as cited in the Resource Section.)

For those learners who are at or near the high school reading or math level at intake, some learning centers will give a section of the Official GED Practice Tests as part of the procedure. If this is necessary, we suggest you use GED Practice Test Form A, or PA, so that the Practice Test forms B and C can be set aside for progress and final predictive tests. However, *GED as Project* will build in taking the Practice Test, topic by topic, in the introductory Learning Projects for each content area. If the tests can be taken then, instead of during intake, the learner will be able to take full advantage of the thinking process we are advocating.

Disabilities

Guidebook 1 of the National Institute for Literacy's *Bridges to Practice* states that from 3 to 15 percent of the general population of American adults display learning disabilities. Within our adult learning population, the perception is that the numbers are significantly higher. "Research has yet to determine just what the proportion is; estimates range from 30 to 80%" (p. xi.) These learning disabilities, often undiagnosed, include varying levels of difficulty with listening, thinking, speaking, reading or writing.

GED instructors must meet a vast array of levels and styles of learning. Because of the group work, and the careful attention to the process of thinking and learning promoted by this guide, we believe this approach to study can work effectively with students with learning disabilities.

Accommodations should be provided as they would in any GED class, from straight-edges to audio tapes, and, in keeping with good instruction, special one-on-one assistance should be provided as needed. Accommodations can be built into any learning project to adapt to learners of varying abilities within the range of the GED class.

An exhaustive study of assessment and accommodations for the learning disabled student is beyond the range of this guide, but friendly and accessible resources are available in abundance. A primary resource is the GED Testing Service Web site, which you will find in the Resources Section at the end of this guide. The excerpt from the Web site offers a quick sketch of what a formal assessment of a learning disability would mean:

In order to determine if someone has a learning disability, psycho/educational assessment is necessary. This assessment compares a person's intellectual potential profile, information processing and developmental history with a person's current academic achievement. A person with a learning disability will have average to above average intellectual potential with a pattern of relative strengths and weaknesses. Those areas of weakness will represent the area of information processing weakness. The areas of processing weakness can be expected to significantly interfere with academic achievement. To determine if these characteristics are present psychologists, neurologists, and educators do evaluations or assessments. Diagnosis is based on significant differences in standard score comparisons.

This site also provides a section on accommodations and directions on how to fill out an L-15 form, which is necessary to obtain accommodations on the GED test itself for your student.

In short, assessment takes many forms. For *GED as Project*, the Official GED Practice Test provides both pre- and post-testing, as well as instructional stimuli, while the Learning Projects within the guide provide a means of on-going assessment in keeping with the instructional approach.