

Diagnostic Assessments

(Video at: www.trinitycollege.com/TESOL-AL)

This video looks at diagnostic assessments and their role in helping plan teaching.

00:09 – 01:46 Diagnostic assessment overview
01:47 – 05:44 Understanding a student’s needs
05:45 – 10:29 Different ways to assess skills

10:30 – 14:00 Different ways to assess systems
14:01 – 16:47 Using data to plan learning goals

1. Before watching the video

What type of diagnostic assessment tools do you use with your students?

When do you do diagnostic assessments with your students?

What do you do with the information you have collected from your diagnostic assessments?

2. During the video

Types of Assessment Overview (00:09) and Understanding a student’s needs (01:47)

Now watch the first two sections of the video ‘Diagnostic assessment overview’ and ‘Understanding a student’s needs’ and answer the following questions.

What is another way to refer to diagnostic assessments?

In addition to identifying students' needs, what else can diagnostic assessments be used to identify?

Why might there be differences between students' needs and students' wants?

How might diagnostic assessments differ with adults and children?

Different ways to assess skills (05:45)

Now watch the next section of the video on Different ways to assess skills and answer the questions below.

What two ways for carrying out diagnostic assessments are discussed?

What some of the problems with using a checklist for diagnostic assessments?

Different ways to assess systems (10:30)

Now watch the next section of the video on Different ways to assess systems and answer the questions below.

In addition to the four skills, what other areas do teachers need to assess when administering a diagnostic test?

What might be easier for teachers who are teaching monolingual classes (i.e. classes where students all share the same first language)?

Why does Jason talk about the number of words in the English language and the number of words 'first language' speakers know?

Using data to plan learning goals (14:01)

Now watch the next section of the video on using data to plan learning goals and answer the questions below.

What do teachers need to raise their students' awareness of?

1. _____

2. _____

Apart from the students' needs, what other factors do teachers need to bear in mind when planning their students' courses?

1. _____

2. _____

How can diagnostic assessments help the teacher?

3. Discussion points

In the final section of the video, Ben and Jason discuss how diagnostic assessments can not only help the teacher plan what to cover in the lessons but also help the teacher to determine what 'path' and what order they need to take.

Now think about how you use the data you collect from your students' diagnostic assessments. To what extent do you use it to help determine the path you take with your students.

Consider these arguments against the use of diagnostic assessments:

- 1) There is little point in doing a diagnostic assessment as I cannot make any changes because I have to follow a prescribed syllabus.
- 2) Although I can learn about a lot of my students' individual needs, I cannot accommodate all of them.

To what extent do you agree and what are the counter-arguments to these?

4. Further learning

If you want to learn more about this topic, look at these resources:

Books

- Anderson, J. (2017). *Trinity CertTESOL Companion*. London: Delta Publishing
- Baxter, A., & Seligson, P. (1997). *Evaluating your students*. London: Richmond Publishing
- Smith, B. & Swan, M. (2001). *Learner English*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Ur, P. (1999). *A Course in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: CUP.

Websites

- <http://tedpower.co.uk/esl0706.html>
- <http://tinyurl.com/TESOL-diagnostic-tests>

Journal article

- Knoch, U. (2009). 'Diagnostic assessment of writing: A comparison of two rating scales'. *Language Testing*, 26(2), pp275-304.
- Read, J. (2008). 'Identifying academic language needs through diagnostic assessment'. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes*, 7(3), pp180-190.