

## Direct Versus Indirect Assessment of Student Learning

It is important to understand the distinction between direct and indirect evidence of student learning. Direct evidence of student learning is tangible, visible, and measureable and tends to be more compelling evidence of exactly what students have and have not learned. This is because you can directly look at students' work or performances to determine what they've learned.

Indirect evidence tends to be composed of proxy signs that students are probably learning. An example of indirect evidence is a survey asking students to self-report what they have learned. This is evidence that students probably are learning what they report to have learned, but is not as compelling as a faculty member actually looking at students' work. It is not uncommon in students' self-reports to either inflate or undervalue what they have actually learned.

## Distinguishing Between Direct and Indirect Assessment

While it is easy to distinguish between what is direct evidence of student learning and what is indirect, some evidence of learning is less clear. For example, peer reviews of student work. While students are actually submitting work to demonstrate what they have learned, a faculty member may not ever see this work or have an opportunity to evaluate it. Would this be an example of direct or indirect evidence? There are a few considerations that can be helpful in determining whether an assessment is direct or indirect evidence of student learning.

### Considerations

1. Does the assessment measure the learning or is it a proxy for learning?

**Direct Evidence:** Students have completed some work or product that demonstrates they have achieved the learning outcome. Examples: project, paper, performance

**Indirect Evidence:** A proxy measure was used, such as participation in a learning activity, students' opinions about what was learned, student satisfaction, etc. Examples: teaching evaluations, surveys asking students how much they think they learned, course grades

2. Who decides what was learned or how well it was learned?

**Direct Assessment:** a professional makes a decision regarding what a student learned and how well it was learned. Examples: faculty evaluated papers, tests, or performances

**Indirect Assessment:** the student decides what he or she learned and how well it was learned. Examples: surveys, teaching evaluations