

Use Assessment

Why? To Increase Student Application of a Biblical Perspective to Course Content

Imagine.

Every student in every class—proficiently applying a biblical perspective.

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If this happened, how would this affect your students' understanding of the importance of looking at all of life through the lens of Scripture? How would this affect your students' ability to impact the world for Christ?

If this happened, how would parents respond? How would your colleagues respond? How would your board respond? How would this affect the achievement of your school's outcomes and mission?

Just imagine.

Every student in every class—proficiently applying a biblical perspective.

Assessment Helps Students Improve Their Application of a Biblical Perspective

You know the following five statements are true:

1. Writing essays helps your students improve their writing.
2. Singing in concerts helps your students improve their singing.
3. Giving presentations helps your students improve their presentation skills.
4. Playing basketball games helps your students improve their basketball skills.
5. Performing in plays helps your students improve their acting.

Why am I telling you this? Here's why: Essays, concerts, presentations, games, and plays help your students improve. Essays, concerts, presentations, games, and plays are forms of assessment. Assessment helps your students improve.

Connection? Assessment helps your students improve their application of a biblical perspective. That's right. Your students will improve their application of a biblical perspective as they complete rigorous assessments that require them to connect course content, their lives, and a biblical perspective.

Ask yourself, "If my students completed an assessment in each unit like those listed below, how would that affect their proficiency?"

- Science 2: Write a two-paragraph report about a dinosaur of your choice. Include where the dinosaur lived, when it lived, what it ate, what it looked like, its size, how it got its name, who found it, and any other interesting facts you found. Give three examples of how your dinosaur shows God's creativity and power.
- Math 6: Construct a model of the solar system that accurately represents planet size and planet distance from the sun. Next, write a paragraph in response to the following question: What does math have to do with God's world? In your paragraph, make three connections between the biblical truths we studied in class and the model you made. Include quotations from two Bible passages.
- English 10: Write a 1000-word essay to answer the following two questions: Who are you? How does knowing who you are help you love your neighbor and/or heal what's wrong in the world? In your answer use first-person, use six quotations (three from the literature studied in class and three from the Bible) and cite a minimum of seven sources (including works of literature, the Bible, and a Bible dictionary).

Effective Assessment Helps Students Increase Their Proficiency

Completing an assessment helps students increase their proficiency in applying a biblical perspective, particularly if the assessment is effective. What are the characteristics of an effective biblical perspective assessment?

(1) An effective biblical perspective assessment requires students to connect course content and a biblical perspective *or* (preferably) course content, their lives, and a biblical perspective. (Please remember that connecting course content and a biblical perspective does not mean having students develop object lessons or associate Bible verses with a topic.)

What does this look like?

- Social Studies 5: Write a one-page essay about the following: Based on what the Bible teaches about war, would you have fought in the Revolutionary War on the side of the colonists? In your answer, explain what the Bible teaches (cite two Bible verses). Next, use what the Bible teaches to evaluate reasons colonists fought in the war. Conclude with what you would do and why.
- Science 9: Use three carbon footprint calculators to estimate your family's and your greenhouse gas emissions and compare your results with national averages. In the context of using your learning to care for God's creation, identify three ways to reduce your carbon footprint. Next, make a poster that shows what you learned, including your calculations for greenhouse gas emissions, a graph of your personal footprint, a written explanation of a biblical perspective on why Christians should be concerned about the size of their carbon footprint, and three or more steps you are taking or could take to reduce the size of your carbon footprint.

(2) An effective biblical perspective assessment assesses student learning, *not* student faith. Students are sensitive to this and may feel that being assessed on how well they can use a biblical perspective means being assessed on how good a Christian they are.

To address this, design assessments that assess how well a student can apply a biblical perspective to how they use money, *not* how committed they are to honoring Jesus by how they use money. Or design an assessment in which a student has to explain the plan of salvation to a hypothetical person, *not* the extent to which the student is committed to Jesus.

This is similar to how other assessments are handled. For example, when a student takes a fitness test, the score is not affected by how committed the student is to fitness. When a student takes a reading test, the score is not affected by how committed the student is to reading. Assessment should assess learning, not motivation.

Assessing student learning also means assessing what was taught—another way to make clear to students that their faith is not being assessed. Target teaching value-added content. Target teaching new biblical perspective content and/or new connections between course content and a biblical perspective. For example, teach students the just war theory and ask them to apply it to a war that they studied in class. Teach students about what it means to be created in God's image and have them apply this to substance abuse issues studied in class.

(3) An effective biblical perspective assessment is worthy of being taught to. With an effective assessment, there is no danger of over-teaching to the assessment—just like there is no danger of over-teaching to a band concert, an Advanced Placement test, or a basketball game. Our seniors, for example, give a 30-minute presentation of an analysis of and biblical response to a social issue. We teach to this assessment, and we find that we cannot over-teach to this assessment.

(4) An effective biblical perspective assessment is rigorous. It's challenging, engaging, and requires appropriate thinking levels. Biblical perspective assessments should be showcase assessments. For example: Write a 750-word reflection on the power and prevalence of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination, and how Christians are to think about and respond

to them. Support your answer from literature, history, current events, your experience, and the Bible. In your essay, be sure to include at least two quotations from *Night*, an analysis of the biblical principles of how God intends for people to treat other people (using at least three quotations from the Bible), and at least one general action people can take and one specific thing you can do.

Want to Make Your Assessment Even More Effective? Here's How:

1. Invite a colleague to use the four characteristics to check it and to provide input in terms of wording and format. Collaborating will help get your assessment refined to a level that is usually reached after giving the assessment to students once or twice.
2. Design the assessment to allow students to make choices about content and format. When students make choices, their engagement increases. How can you do this? When having students work on a project, have them make choices about the topic, relevant life experiences, and format (poster, model, diorama).
3. Design the assessment so the audience is outside the classroom. For example, have students write a letter to the editor regarding a biblical perspective of a social issue or give a presentation to parents regarding a biblical perspective of current movies and music.
4. Take the assessment yourself, using your findings revise your assessment, and then give it to your students. Taking the assessment gives you first-hand experience with the clarity, precision, and feasibility of the assessment.
5. Finalize the assessment before you start the unit. If you do this, you will be able to design instruction to target the assessment. For example, if the assessment is a project, you might use cooperative grouping, Venn diagrams, and reflective writing. If the assessment is a presentation, you might use discussion, direct instruction in presentation skills, and drill and practice.
6. At the start of the unit, tell your students what the assessment is and how you are going to prepare them for it, show them the rubric so they understand the expectations, and show them appropriate samples so they know what good work looks like.

How Will You Apply What You Have Just Read?

Using assessment has helped our students better understand and apply a biblical perspective of course content. Would using assessment help your students? If so, what step will you take this week?

Here are four options:

1. Give your students a biblical perspective assessment.
2. Ask a colleague to help you revise one assessment so that it meets the four characteristics of an effective biblical perspective assessment.
3. Respond to the following questions: How much practice do your students need to proficiently use a biblical perspective of course content in a given subject? How much practice do your students currently receive?
4. Talk for 15 minutes with a colleague about this article.

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Assess Student Application of a Biblical Perspective

Use the rubric to assess the student work sample below. Directions:

1. Review the rubric. Identify the two criteria and the five ratings.
2. Read the assessment prompt. Please note that you are *only* using the rubric to assess the last part of the prompt: “What of truth (from a biblical perspective) has the author seen, and what has he missed?”
3. Use the rubric to assess the student work sample.
4. Reflect on the two questions below.

Rubric

Criteria	Excellent	Good	OK/ At Standard	Developing/ Below Standard	Starting
Biblical perspective content	Significantly beyond the obvious	Beyond the obvious	Basic, addresses the obvious	Limited, does not fully address the obvious	Lacking, hardly addresses the obvious
Application of biblical perspective to course content	Original	Thoughtful	Predictable	Weak or erroneous	Lacking

Assessment Prompt (English 10, Short-Answer Test Question)

Describe the existentialism of the author we read who wrote both essays and short stories on the topic. Be sure to include the definition, the juxtaposition that makes humanity’s situation absurd, the two things the author says give meaning, and illustrate those two things from the story. *What of truth (from a biblical perspective) has the author seen, and what has he missed?*

Student Work Sample

Albert Camus believed in existentialism, that life was meaningless and there was no afterlife. Still, he insisted that by acting and living as if there is meaning to life, we can create some for ourselves. He wants to enjoy life to the fullest, which is what Solomon said in the Bible. Yet, if we were randomly created and/or evolved, it makes no sense for us to want meaning and purpose. Camus refused to believe that Christ died for our sin and gave us meaning, or that heaven and hell were real.

Questions for Reflection

1. How did you feel about using a rubric to assess student application of a biblical perspective?
2. How can assessing student application of a biblical perspective positively impact students, parents, staff, alumni, donors, and the board?

Possible sidebars

What's the Framework?

Here's a four-part framework for helping students apply a biblical perspective to course content. This article addresses part three.

1. At Christian schools, students increase their understanding and application of a biblical perspective.
2. Students increase their understanding and application of a biblical perspective in all subjects by responding to questions regarding course content and by learning value-added biblical perspective content.
3. *Students increase their understanding and application of a biblical perspective as they complete rigorous assessments that require them to connect course content, their lives, and a biblical perspective.*
4. Student assessment performance increases when students prepare for assessments by having their learning needs addressed.

How Much Practice Do Your Students Need?

Being educated involves being able to do some things automatically. For example:

- Typing the correct letters on the keyboard
- Knowing when to go left in a basketball game
- Reciting John 3:16
- Using the writing process when doing an essay
- Speaking with appropriate volume and pace
- Knowing that $5 \times 5 = 25$
- Spelling words correctly

How much practice does a student need before she can do the above? Quite a bit.

Being educated at a Christian school involves being able to do some things automatically. For example, applying a biblical perspective to course content.

1. How much practice do your students need to “automatically” apply a biblical perspective to what they study in your class?
2. How much practice do your students currently receive?
3. What will you do to close the gap between the amount of practice your students need and the amount of practice your students get?

Being Christian Does Not Equal Being Proficient

You're a new teacher at Faithful Christian School. Your students come from Christian homes, say they are Christians, and regularly attend church, Sunday school, and youth group. They behave well, encourage each other, and focus on learning. You like teaching at Faithful Christian, and parents thank you for being a positive role model.

In your English class, you help your students grapple with romanticism and realism, and you ask your students to use realism to evaluate romanticism. This involves upper-level thinking, and your students do well.

Next, you ask your students to use a biblical perspective to evaluate romanticism, and they don't do as well as before. You are puzzled, particularly since both assignments required a similar skill set. You wonder, “Why didn't they get it?”

You reflect on what you did. “To teach romanticism and realism, I used direct instruction, had them analyze several pieces of literature which reflect each perspective, had them role play each perspective, and finally had them complete a Venn diagram regarding the two perspectives. And

they got it. They understood romanticism, and they know a lot about the Bible, so why didn't they get it?"

Why didn't they get it? In the second example, students did not:

1. Receive direct instruction on a biblical perspective of the issues romanticism seeks to address.
2. Analyze relevant Christian doctrines and Bible passages.
3. Role play a biblical perspective.
4. Complete a Venn diagram regarding romanticism and a biblical perspective.

What enabled students to succeed on the first assessment was not provided for the second assessment. Please remember that being a Christian who behaves well does not equal being a Christian who proficiently applies a biblical perspective to course content.