

PURPOSEFUL **ASSESSMENT PLANNING:**

A **BEST PRACTICE** APPROACH TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT



LiveText is the **industry standard** outcomes assessment solution. **More than 400 programs and institutions** count on LiveText to help improve student learning, manage accreditation and compliance and create a thriving culture of evidence-based assessment practices.

Table of Contents

Purposeful Assessment Planning	3
Define Student Learning Outcomes and Align Standards	4
Develop Measurable Criteria	4
Identify Rich Assessment Activities	6
LiveText Setup	7
Launch Communication to Faculty & Students	9
Train Faculty Assessors & Students	9
Data Review	10
Make Improvements to Teach & Learning	11

Purposeful Assessment Planning



Purposeful Assessment Planning: A Best Practice Approach to Continuous Improvement

Welcome to the LiveText assessment planning guide! This *Guide* was crafted based on our fourteen years of experience working with hundreds of higher education institutions as well as our extensive engagement with thought leaders in best practice assessment and accreditation. Although many of you have already implemented some best practice-based processes, we believe that this *Guide* can serve as a vehicle to ensure that your systems are as effective and efficient as possible. If you have any questions or need further assistance, please feel free to contact your LiveText Implementation Coordinator directly or email implementation@livetext.com.



DEFINE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ALIGN STANDARDS

Within a best practices framework, an assessment plan should be an overarching statement of what a program/unit/institution wants its students to *know* and *do* upon completion of their academic program(s). Specialized, professional, and regional accreditation bodies hold institutions responsible for providing reliable evidence of the continuous improvement of student learning.

Establishing targeted learning outcomes that may be aligned to internal and external standards is the necessary first step for designing effective academic programs. These outcomes are broader in scope than course objectives; though course objectives should align with outcomes and standards. Establishing student learning outcomes, as well as the associated assessment system needed to track students' progress across a spectrum of well-defined activities should be a highly collaborative process. This process should be led by well-qualified faculty, administrators, and staff, and it should actively engage stakeholders—most notably, students.



DEVELOP MEASURABLE CRITERIA

Once outcomes are created, the second step in the process is to craft measurable criteria for the outcomes defined. These elements are building blocks for the development of rubrics. Best practice suggests establishing 5 to 10 elements per outcome, as demonstrated in the example below:

Critical Thinking: Graduates identify problems, analyze information, and form conclusions.

- a. Identify problem(s) by analyzing the impact of contextual factors, the validity of information (relevancy, sufficiency, and accuracy), and the influence of assumptions.
- b. Collect additional information, as needed, using a variety of relevant sources to resolve the problem.

c. Evaluate, synthesize, and organize information to form a position and create a coherent set of conclusions to support the decisions and solutions.

d. Use problem solving techniques to make informed decisions about all issues, including those with dissonant information; develop and answer provocative questions; and, chose a realistic solution that will provide maximum benefit for the organization and all of its functions.

Once outcomes and elements are defined assessment rubrics can be created more easily. Rubrics spell out learning criteria (in developmental stages) for each outcome and should have some alignment, if necessary, with third-party standards. Most importantly, the creation of these rubrics should be a collaborative faculty effort. Don't hesitate to seek support from colleagues, both internal and external to the institution, in this process.

To learn more how others are using rubric based assessment to improve student learning, participate in free webinars offered by LiveText and other organizations, attend assessment-focused conferences, or join relevant list serves.

Dr. Lance Tomei (former Director for Assessment, Accreditation, and Data Management in the College of Education and Human Performance at the University of Central Florida and LiveText Consultant) offers the following information on rubric design in [*Designing Effective Standards/Competencies-aligned Rubrics*](#):

Well-designed rubrics enhance teaching and learning in a variety of ways. Not surprisingly, the ever-increasing focus on accountability for student learning outcomes in higher education has generated attention for the many challenges of designing effective performance assessment rubrics. When aligned to applicable standards/competencies, they help ensure (content) validity of key assessment activities. By making clear distinctions between various performance levels, they reduce subjectivity in assessing student performance and thus contribute to higher degrees of intra- and inter-rater reliability (e.g., the help to ensure accurate, consistent, and fair assessment of student performance).

*An equally important, but rarely discussed, rubric consideration is whether to use a linear or non-linear approach to standards or competencies alignment when designing an array of key/signature assignments and their associated rubrics to capture learning outcomes data across the full spectrum of an academic program's target learning outcomes. **A linear approach** involves assessing each major standard or competency in isolation with a rubric designed specifically to assess that standard or competency. **A non-linear approach** integrates multiple standards or competencies into signature assignments and their associated assessment rubrics. While this is essentially an overall assessment system decision, it has clear rubric design implications. Finally, since rubrics identify performance expectations, they provide a valuable learning scaffold for students.*

As you begin to develop and or re-visit your institutional, college and program rubrics, use the rubric below developed by Dr. Lance Tomei to assess the quality of your products.

Criteria	Unsatisfactory (0 pts)	Developing (1 pt)	Mastery (2 Pts)
Rubric alignment to assignment. 20%	The rubric includes multiple criteria that are not explicitly or implicitly reflected in the assignment directions for the learning activity to be assessed.	The rubric includes one criterion that is not explicitly or implicitly reflected in the assignment directions for the learning activity to be assessed.	The rubric criteria accurately match the performance criteria reflected in the assignment directions for the learning activity to be assessed.
Integrity of Criteria 20%	More than one criterion contains multiple, independent constructs (similar to “double-barreled survey question”).	One criterion contains multiple, independent constructs. All other criteria each consist of a single construct.	Each criterion consists of a single construct.
Comprehensiveness of Criteria 20%	More than one critical indicator for the competency or standard being assessed is not reflected in the rubric.	One critical indicator for the competency or standard being assessed is not reflected in the rubric.	All critical indicators for the competency or standard being assessed are reflected in the rubric.
Quality of Performance Descriptors 40%	Performance descriptors are not distinct (i.e., mutually exclusive) AND collectively do not include all possible learning outcomes.	Performance descriptors are not distinct (i.e., mutually exclusive) OR collectively do not include all possible learning outcomes.	Performance descriptors are distinct (mutually exclusive) AND collectively include all possible learning outcomes.

To view the rubric design webinar presented by Dr. Tomei: <http://info.livetext.com/rubricsmay7>.



IDENTIFY RICH ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

A focused assessment plan is one where clear outcomes are defined and measured at two, three, or more gateways to determine students’ learning progress. When a best practice approach is applied, the desired student learning outcomes are at the core of the entire assessment process. Sometimes, though, we find student learning outcomes are ‘retro-fitted’ to accommodate existing practices, assignments, and rubrics. Accrediting agencies expect the former and, generally, will not accept the latter. Creating key formative and summative assessments helps ensure fair, accurate, and consistent evaluation of students’ performance.

Once the outcomes are defined, measurable criteria created, and associated rubrics crafted, the next step is to identify where you want to assess and measure these learning activities. Creating a curriculum map helps identify the courses in which program and university outcomes will be assessed. The result is a curriculum assessment map, which is a critical element of any effective assessment system:

Curriculum Map

	Course 101	Course 120	Course 210	Program Admission	Course 301	Course 320	Course 410	Course 420 Capstone
Outcome 1:	I	A	R	A	R		A	A
Outcome 2:		I	A	A		R		A
Outcome 3:			I	A	R	A	R	A
Outcome 4:		I	A	A			R	A
Outcome 5:			I	A		R	A	A
Outcome 6:			I	A		R		A

I= Introduced R=Reinforced A=Assess



LIVETEXT SETUP

Having established learning outcomes, an assessment map, and associated rubrics, you are now ready to set up your assessment system within LiveText. LiveText staff members work to prepare your account for the first step in the set up process: constructing rubrics in LiveText. The institution's **LiveText Administrator** (the LTA is the primary liaison between the institution and your LiveText Implementation Team Lead) manages this process to ensure consistency in the treatment of core rubrics. A best practice approach supports a collaborative process, whereby any changes made to rubrics on key assessments are the result of group review and decision making. To allow for the collection of meaningful data, the LTA uses LiveText technology to align institutional, unit, and program outcomes/standards to the appropriate elements (rows) within the rubrics. Using LiveText's *Standards & Outcomes Tool* (due out June 2014), standards/outcomes can be cross-correlated and aligned to specific criteria in rubrics. LTAs can contact their Implementation Coordinators to learn more about this feature.

Master Term: Core assessment setup in LiveText. A *Master Term* houses all courses that contain key assignments and their associated assessment rubrics, as well as other benchmark/gateway experiences that are not part of a course. The Master Term allows for the ease of setting up the

assessment system plan each semester. The Master Term is a convenient way to copy and distribute course assignment shells in LiveText faculty accounts each new academic semester/term. To initiate the process, the course catalog needs to be imported either manually or, preferably, through the LiveText SIS automation process. Once key courses are identified and standards-aligned rubrics are completed, you are now ready to create the master terms. Each new semester/term, the LiveText Administrator will copy master course assignments from the Master term to the new term's courses for faculty use. This is a considerable time-saver, as it avoids having to copy individual courses each semester. In the Master Term within LiveText, you will create key signature assignments and associate program/unit level rubrics to these assignments.

NOTE: Do not make copies of individual rubrics for each associated master course assignment. Doing so will limit trend data reporting; only copy individual rubrics when making changes to the rubric. For consistency in data collection, it is advised to use a group format when making any changes to a rubric that outlines performance expectations for a core assessment.

Training Term: Sample course and assignment setup in LiveText. A *Training Term* houses sample courses and assignments, and is used to train faculty on assessing student artifacts in LiveText. To construct a training term, create and import sample courses and assignments. In addition, create a roster of sample students, associate them with the courses in the training term and import. Identify where key formative and summative assessments will be housed and create signature assignments. It is important to note that not every course needs to house a key formative or summative program-level assessment. Remember, these key assessments will generate the data that will be used for accountability and accreditation, so the goal is to develop an assessment system that provides comprehensive data in the most efficient means possible. Minimally, all program-level student learning outcomes should be assessed at least once at an appropriate mid-program transition point (e.g., prior to student teaching in initial teach preparation programs) to produce formative data and at program completion for summative data results.

Active Term: Import courses, benchmarks/gateways, and student demographics. Best practice suggests integrating LiveText with your SIS and LMS systems. This assures accuracy of the data, automatic add/drops, and a reduction in workload on the LiveText Administrator. Your LiveText Implementation Coordinator can assist you in this process. Prior to the semester launch, set up a conference call or meeting with the appropriate IT staff and your LiveText Implementation Coordinator. Your Implementation Coordinator will provide the technical information and work with IT to test the integration. Once the testing is complete, data from your SIS system will automatically update in LiveText on a real-time basis or on a batch basis.

Copy Assessments From Master Term to Active Term. If the integration is automated, the LTA will begin to copy the program/unit course assignments from Master Term to the Active Term. If the automation process was not completed, manually upload the new term course catalogs, course rosters, and student demographic information. Then copy assignments from Master Term to the Active Term.



LAUNCH COMMUNICATION TO FACULTY & STUDENTS

The importance of building a communications plan to support an assessment system is often neglected; however, it is a crucial element in a successful implementation plan. All stakeholders should know what the assessment goals and expectations are, what resources are available, and how data are collected and used for improvement. Consider using multiple avenues for initial announcements and ongoing updates, including email, blogs, twitter, etc. Remember, email works well with faculty and staff, but it should not be the sole method of communicating with students. Communication around the assessment process needs to be clear, well-organized, and, most importantly, focused on the purpose of an assessment process: continuous improvement of teaching and learning. Your Implementation Coordinator can share samples of effective communication, such as a letter from the Dean to students explaining the importance of accreditation/assessment, and the role that LiveText plays in this process.

Faculty Orientation. One of the first public stages in launching an assessment plan is to organize a faculty orientation. During this meeting, it is critical to maintain a focus on the larger concepts related to assessment and accreditation. Yet, the common pitfall is ‘drilling down’ into the technical details of the process at this initial stage. This level of training should be reserved for faculty who are assessing in LiveText during a given semester/term. Keep the initial orientation centered on the purpose of an assessment plan: enhanced teaching and learning.

Visible, consistent support from leadership is critical for developing, launching, and sustaining an effective assessment system, whether at the department, unit, or institution level. Without it, it is extremely challenging to garner cooperation from all the necessary stakeholders—students, faculty, administrators, and alumni. It is also important to identify the assessment leadership, and provide adequate resources and support to those who manage its implementation.



TRAIN FACULTY ASSESSORS & STUDENTS

Best practice suggests that when training faculty for the first time you demonstrate and train on only the features and functions most often used. In most situations, faculty will be required to assess students on one or more key formative or summative assessments using a rubric provided by the LiveText Administrator. Therefore, you may want to limit initial faculty training to basic information, such as signing on, understanding the faculty dashboard, and conducting assessments in LiveText. Instructing faculty on how to build rubrics and assignments in their initial training session may add confusion and complexity to the project. Since best practice suggests that the LiveText Administrator develop unit and/or program rubrics, as well as construct and distribute key signature assignments, faculty training should be focused only on learning how to assess students. Advanced training may be available for faculty who may want to learn how to develop course-based assessments and assignments.

Most students can learn to use LiveText through training materials that are available in the HelpCenter after logging in through www.livetext.com, or via LiveText Implementation and Support Departments. However, some campuses will offer several 30-45 minute LiveText learning labs each semester. Your LiveText Implementation Coordinator can offer assistance with designing student orientation and hands-on training with assignment and submission activities. LiveText Administrators should be available to students during the semester for ongoing training and support, whether in person or online.



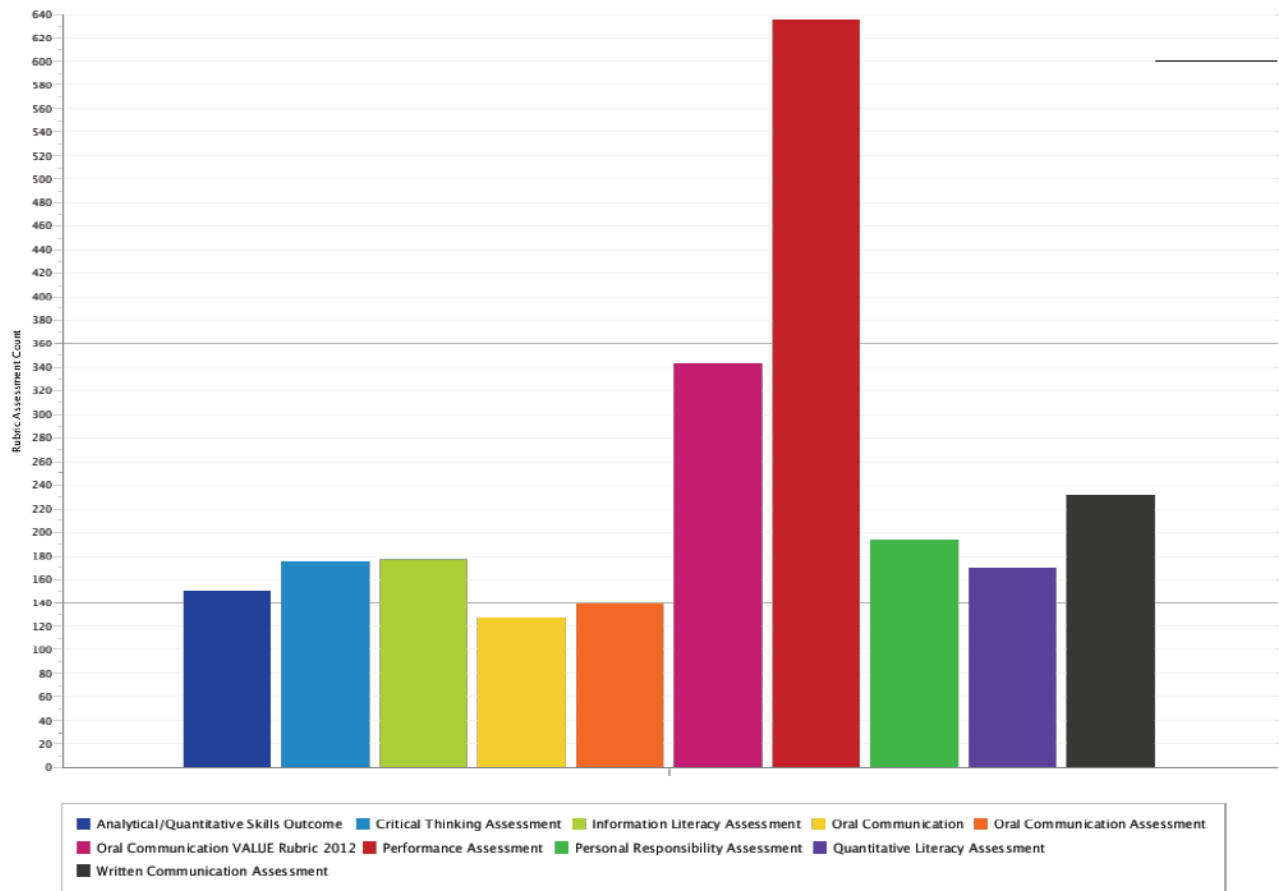
DATA REVIEW

During and at the end of each semester, best practice suggests that the LiveText Administrator create various LiveText Reports. Once the reports are created, information should be shared back to the appropriate departments. The results of the reports should be discussed for program continuous improvements. Best practice suggests that “report meetings” should occur prior to the semester’s end so that faculty members have an opportunity to adjust curriculum and instruction prior to the new semester.

LiveText offers several reporting solutions. Faculty have access to both “Quick View” reports which can be accessed directly from the faculty dashboard, and enhanced reporting which can be accessed from the “Tools” tab. We advise training faculty on how to access assessment information through the QuickView Reports located on the faculty dashboard.

Designated assessment coordinators, department chairs, and administrators can also access report capabilities by using the “Tools” tab. The enhanced reporting tools allow designated users to access, disaggregate, and aggregate rubric outcomes assessment data at many levels—institution, college, program, department, and courses. Further, assessment data can also be filtered by student and faculty demographics, as well as across different time periods (semester, year, time matriculated, etc.). These reports provide the program, college, or institution the necessary data that meets accreditation requirements for continuous improvements to teaching and learning.

Additionally, LiveText offers a more advanced reporting tool, **LiveText Analytics**, which is a comprehensive reporting system that offers enhanced graphical representation of the above-mentioned functions and the institution the opportunity to compare assessment data to GPA and various national Test scores. For users’ convenience, custom dashboards can be created for personalized viewing. Reports can be saved in LiveText or exported and saved in an Excel and/or pdf file format.



MAKE IMPROVEMENTS TO TEACHING & LEARNING

It is important that faculty review and assess students' work in a timely fashion, within the given term. Without the on-time review, students are left to wonder not only about their progress but also to question the value of assessment. Programs/units/institutions should continually review the results and modify their processes based on data to ensure students' learning needs are met. Include students in the feedback loop, and actively engage them in the learning and development of these outcomes. This will help them understand and value the criteria, standards, and methods by which they are assessed—making real-world connections and application of what they are learning.

FEEDBACK LOOP: A Best Practice Approach to Continuous Improvement

Improvement and follow-up are an integral part of assessment, as they serve to ‘close the loop.’

- Formative assessment is done to provide feedback for ongoing activities, and to inform any needed mid-course corrections.
- Summative assessment is done to measure a project’s overall success.
- Longitudinal assessment tracks impacts beyond the duration or initial scope of the project.

If we don’t build follow up into the assessment cycle, then the overarching purpose is lost. Assessment should be viewed as a self-reflective process for students and an opportunity for instructors and administrators to present concrete evidence of learning improvement. When a best practice process of assessment is developed, and technology is used to facilitate and support it, we are able to more clearly see a fuller picture of student learning at all levels—for individual students, within and across courses, within and across programs, and across an entire institution. When educational technology is built into the teaching process, the systematized process allows for the following benefits:

- Opportunities for the academic community to articulate student learning goals, to determine the degree to which these goals align with student and marketplace needs, and to evaluate if students’ overall performances coincide with the institution’s expectations.
- Ways for academic programs to understand the dimensions of student learning when seeking to improve student achievement and the educational process.
- Evidence of student achievement for accreditation or quality assurance regulating groups.

This Guide Book was designed to assist higher education communities with establishing assessment systems that are framed by a best practice approach. The desired result is a process of continuous improvement that results in enhanced student learning and achievement. LiveText is proud to partner with colleges and universities in the implementation of successful academic processes to ultimately improve student learning and achievement.