

# — REIMAGINING — COLLEGE ACCESS

## Performance Assessments in College Admission

Designing an Effective  
and Equitable Process

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## Table of Contents

Performance Assessments: A More Authentic Pathway to College Admission.....	4
Step 1: Know Your “Why” .....	7
Step 2: Determine Which Artifacts to Request.....	9
Step 3: Craft and Refine Your Ask.....	12
Step 4: Conduct Outreach and Communicate Your Request.....	14
Performance Assessments in Higher Education Admission: A Hypothetical Example .....	16
Recommendations .....	18
Appendix A: Connecting Performance Assessments to Admission Needs .....	19
Appendix B: Annotated Example of Materials Request Language .....	20

### List of Tables

<b>Table 1</b>	Performance Assessment Uses in Admission .....	7
<b>Table 2</b>	What Information Do Performance Assessment Artifacts Reveal?.....	11

## Performance Assessments: A More Authentic Pathway to College Admission

At the same time that many colleges and universities are seeking new ways to more equitably admit and support students, a growing number of schools and districts are [using performance assessments](#) to prepare for and monitor deeper learning in high school. Performance assessments measure students' knowledge, skills, and abilities by asking students to use them in the real-world contexts in which they are required. (See [Defining Performance Assessments on p. 6.](#)) They are a key feature of programs like the [International Baccalaureate](#) and the new Advanced Placement [Capstone diploma program](#), as well as school networks and districts that center capstone projects and portfolios for graduation—such as those in the [California Performance Assessment Collaborative](#) and [New York's Performance Standards Consortium](#). Student performance on well-designed assessments provides a reflection of deeper learning practices and offers rigorous and equitable ways to surface important academic and nonacademic knowledge and skills.

The use of such assessments in high schools can also support a curriculum that focuses more purposefully on teaching the research, analysis, and communication skills students need to succeed in college. Indeed, research suggests that students who demonstrate competence on performance assessments that measure deeper learning are more successful in college than other similar students, even when they may score lower on standardized test measures like the SAT (for examples, see [Assessing College Readiness Through Authentic Student Work](#)). Because performance assessments surface examples of how students really use their academic and nonacademic learning in authentic situations, they can help admission officers at institutions of higher education better understand the students who are applying for admission: their competence, strengths, interests, motivations, and potential.

Schools and departments in the fine arts, performing arts, and architecture have long used portfolios for admission purposes, and some other universities, such as MIT and the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan, have done so for a number of years as well. Recently, more colleges and universities have been exploring the use of performance assessments as part of equitable admission processes. These colleges have learned that their ability to use authentic evidence of student learning well in the admission process depends on what they can learn about the context and purpose of the students' work, which in turn determines how they frame the “ask” of students.

### Using This Tool

**Purpose.** This tool was created in collaboration with experienced admission officers and other k–12 and higher education experts. It delineates four steps that support higher education institutions in requesting the performance assessment information that can be most helpful to their admission processes:

1. Know Your “Why”
2. Determine Which Artifacts to Request
3. Craft and Refine Your Ask
4. Conduct Outreach and Communicate Your Request

These steps are described sequentially for clarity, but we expect that the process of requesting performance assessments and artifacts will be an iterative one: Admission professionals will revisit steps over time as they develop and refine the performance assessment “ask” that helps them best support students. See the [hypothetical example on p. 16](#) of how admission teams might move through the steps outlined in this tool.

Although this tool is intended to provide short-term support to individual institutions and postsecondary systems, we expect that, over time, institutions will refine the processes and develop more systematic approaches for including performance assessments in college admission. In a related project, a revised portal for the Common App is being designed to offer a template for how authentic work can be described, uploaded, and efficiently viewed and understood.

**Structure.** This tool is structured around four steps admission officers can go through to incorporate performance assessments as part of more useful and equitable admission processes. While the steps are presented sequentially, we expect that admission teams will iteratively revisit steps as they hone their use of performance assessments in admission processes. Each step includes:

- **contextual information** to provide rationale and background on what to consider;
- **a framing question** for admission teams to address; and
- **activities to consider** to put this step into action.

**Users.** This tool is designed for admission staff at higher education institutions seeking to use performance assessments as part of their admission processes. While performance assessments can provide meaningful information to support academic advising and placement decisions for matriculating students, this tool is intended to support those officers most directly involved in application and admission processes.

## Defining Performance Assessments

Performance assessments\* fall along a spectrum of opportunities for students to demonstrate and receive feedback on what they know and are able to do through application of their knowledge, skills, and abilities in meaningful contexts that, together, more closely approximate how student learning is actually used. As described in *Beyond the Bubble Test*, performance assessments might look like short, on-demand tasks, such as responses to an open-ended prompt; experiences that take up to a few hours, such as conducting laboratory investigations, writing a paper or memo, or presenting ideas; or extended, in-depth projects that happen over days to months and involve iteration, feedback, and revision, such as conducting and presenting original research or engaging in multidisciplinary projects. Depending on the purpose of an assessment, performance assessments can be highly individualized to specific students, or they can be designed with common tasks or task elements that can be reliably used and scored across classrooms and contexts.

In k–12 systems, performance assessments often take one of the following forms:

- **Curriculum-embedded performance assessments** are administered in the classroom as part of ongoing teaching and learning. These types of performance assessments are part of instructional units that might include inquiry tasks, essays, presentations, or problem solutions that are designed to provide occasions for specific feedback and guidance for student learning; common performance tasks that are used as end-of-unit assessments in lieu of on-demand tests; or extended projects that are part of students' classroom experiences that serve both formative and summative purposes.
- **Capstone projects** are separate student-designed projects that demonstrate cumulative competencies within or across domains and disciplines. Capstone projects are often positioned as end-of-instruction projects (e.g., high school graduation capstone projects) separate from students' ongoing coursework; these projects allow students to showcase not only cross-disciplinary knowledge and skills, but also other 21st-century skills, such as communication, collaboration, and creativity.
- **Student portfolios** are a curated collection of student work (often from curriculum-embedded assessments) that together can be used to evaluate student mastery of specific competencies or skills. Student portfolios can be used within specific courses or course sequences or across multiple courses within a grade level or grade band.

Across all purposes, what makes performance assessment a particularly valid form of assessment is the authenticity of the tasks students are asked to complete. Performance assessments measure what students know and can do by asking them to apply their learning under the actual conditions for which that learning has relevance and value. As a result, performance assessments (1) surface stronger evidence of student understanding of specific disciplinary knowledge and practices than assessments that focus on isolated memorized facts and skills; (2) allow students to demonstrate their learning in relevant combinations that reflect higher-order thinking and problem-solving; and (3) directly support the kinds of teaching and learning approaches that lead to deeper learning.

\* Here, we refer specifically to instruments (e.g., tasks) that are considered performance assessments; this is in contrast to performance assessment systems, which imply horizontal and vertical coherence. We fully acknowledge that performance assessments are most powerful within those systems; this document specifically focuses on defining performance assessment instruments that can be used within a range of high-quality teaching and learning systems.

## Step 1: Know Your “Why”

Because performance assessments can reveal so many different aspects of student knowledge, skills, and abilities, it is important for admission officers to carefully consider *why* they want different and/or additional information. These reasons might include expanding opportunities for underserved students; identifying students with particular competencies to ensure fit or preparedness; or more deeply understanding student motivations, passions, and potential. Based on this identified purpose (see Table 1), admission officers can then consider what specific features would be most helpful to explicitly target through materials students share. By the end of this step, admission officers should be able to answer this framing question: **What do I want to know about students that current application materials do not convey, and why do I need this information?**

**Table 1: Performance Assessment Uses in Admission**

If I want to know more about ...	Performance assessments can help me because ...
<b>A student’s 21st-century skills</b>	Performance assessments can reveal aspects of student performance, such as creativity, collaboration, reflection, agency, and flexibility, in ways that standardized tests cannot. When drawn from school- or course-based work, performance assessments can also provide a window into whether grades, scores, and other metrics include 21st-century skills as part of the information that they are conveying.
<b>Student mastery of specific competencies (e.g., core disciplinary areas, particular targeted competencies) in k–12</b>	Performance assessments can reveal how sophisticated student understanding and performance are by asking students to apply their learning in real-world contexts that require mastery of the targeted knowledge and skills. If drawn from school- or course-based work, performance assessments can also provide a window into the degree to which grades and scores reflect high-level performance within a class or discipline.
<b>Student passions, interests, and motivations</b>	Performance assessments can reveal student passions and motivations that are often obscured by traditional grades, scores, and transcripts by providing students with opportunities to explore and highlight relevant and meaningful phenomena and problems; make their interests and identities an important part of completing a task; and make choices in terms of what, why, and/or how they engage in a task.
<b>The quality of a student’s k–12 learning experiences</b>	Performance assessments can be an indicator of a high-quality teaching and learning system at the course, discipline, school, and/or pathway level. Because high-quality performance assessments require students to critically make sense of complex and real-world phenomena, problems, and situations, systems that use performance assessments tend to emphasize: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deep mastery of core knowledge, skills, and abilities;</li> <li>• development of key dispositions and 21st-century skills; and</li> <li>• empowerment of students to understand the relevance of learning to their lives and develop the confidence and motivation to engage meaningfully in problems of the real world.</li> </ul>

## Activities That Support Step 1:

- 1. Conduct an analysis of your current admission processes and outcomes.** Analyze features of both the formal admission systems (e.g., what information your existing application collects, how different application features are evaluated, what algorithms are used to determine how different aspects of the application are used for decision-making) and the more informal influences (e.g., k–12 schools or systems that you trust, recommenders with high value, etc.). As part of the analysis, consider what information about academic and nonacademic factors is driving admission decisions and how that manifests in the admitted student body.
- 2. Collaboratively articulate a clear set of admission goals with appropriate stakeholders.** These goals might include higher admission and matriculation rates for students of color and students from low-income families generally or in specific disciplines or programs, better representation of state or regional populations, more academic and interest diversity, etc.
- 3. Develop a theory of action** that describes how performance assessments will transform admission processes to achieve the stated admission goals. As part of developing a theory of action, consider what information will help realize these goals, including the following:
  - Do we want to know about individual students or about the system their learning was part of?
  - Do we want to know about something that is not addressed by traditional application measures (e.g., grades, test scores, lists of extracurricular activities), or do we want more information to contextualize the provided measures?
  - Do we want to determine whether students possess a specific set of knowledge, skills, and abilities, or are we looking for more holistic information about the learner generally?
  - Are we using this information for admission decisions, to intentionally support student success once they are here, or both?
  - Is this information we want all students to submit, or is this information we want to see from particular applicants (e.g., early admission applicants or applicants to a specific program or pathway)?
  - Is this information required or optional?



## Step 2: Determine Which Artifacts to Request

Once admission officers know why they want to use performance assessment information within admission, they will need to determine which artifacts students should submit to meet that goal. For performance assessments to be used in ways that advance equity, it is important that admission staff consider how to request and use authentic work that can be completed as part of school-based projects, assignments, and assessments (e.g., research papers or projects completed as part of coursework). Artifacts that require extra resources, time, out-of-school opportunities, or considerable support may inadvertently disadvantage some learners, privileging those with access to certain kinds of resources.

The nature of performance assessments is that there are many moving pieces—tasks, evaluations, student work, and reflections. Admission officers should choose those artifacts that will convey the most information in the most usable format for their processes. While this will certainly shift based on purpose, admission officers might generally find **student work, student reflections on that work, and some kind of external evaluation** to be key artifacts to ask for. These artifacts provide context for what students are submitting and why this is important to them, while also validating student performance without requiring admission officers to have disciplinary expertise. At the end of this step, admission officers should be able to answer this framing question: **What artifacts are we looking for, and what features should those artifacts highlight?**

### Features of High-Quality Performance Assessments

**Non-negotiables.** All high-quality performance assessments include a few key features admission officers can rely on seeing; this means that scores on rubrics or innovative mastery-based transcripts can be interpreted quickly and efficiently while surfacing better, deeper understanding of the skills and attributes a candidate is bringing to the table. These “non-negotiables” of performance assessment include the following **common, consistent features of high-quality performance assessments**:

- **They are designed for appropriate, targeted, and high expectations.** Performance assessments are designed for and aligned with the standards, expectations, targets, and/or competencies of the discipline(s) being assessed.
- **They are open-ended and generative.** Students create original artifacts that make facets of their thinking visible at a range of levels.
- **They are equitable, accessible, and student-centered.** High-quality performance assessments are accessible, free from bias, and include supports that enable diverse learners to demonstrate what they do know and what they can do. Many high-quality performance assessments also provide avenues for iteration and reflection.
- **They require authentic student sense-making.** Students engage in authentic and rigorous activities that require using their knowledge, skills, and abilities as they make sense of phenomena and problems.

- **They include clear evaluation criteria** (e.g., rubrics) that reflect the expectations assessed and specific inferences to be made. Performance assessment tasks include clear evaluation criteria, often in the form of rigorous and reliable rubrics.

**Variable features.** In addition to the non-negotiables described above, performance assessments are often designed to highlight particular additional competencies—like 21st-century skills—that can support admission decisions. When requesting performance assessment artifacts, students can submit, and reflect on how, materials specifically highlight some of these features. These variable features may include:

- **Disciplinary sophistication.** Engaging with the complexity, nuance, and uncertainty that is authentic to the discipline(s) being targeted.
- **Authenticity.** Ability to engage meaningfully with real-world tasks.
- **Ability to transfer skills.** Application of knowledge, skills, and abilities to contexts that are different from the learning context.
- **Creativity.** Nonroutine sense-making.
- **Collaboration.** Effective work with others.
- **Student choice.** Ownership over the why, what, and how of a task.
- **Connection to student identities.** Cultural and intellectual conceptualizations of themselves.
- **Student reflection and metacognition.** Student thinking about their own progress, growth, and performance (e.g., opportunities for self-assessment, revision, subsequent goal setting).
- **Curiosity.** Desire to learn and understand new things and how they work.
- **Growth mindset.** Belief that intelligence and talents can advance through perseverance and dedication.
- **Perspective-taking.** The ability to perceive another individual's point of view.
- **Purpose.** A stable and generalized intention to accomplish something meaningful to oneself and consequential to others.

These variable features can both help admission officers specify **what they are looking for** and reveal **how well students demonstrate** these qualities. While no single task or piece of student work will reflect all features, admission officers can consider requesting specific examples that highlight the most important features or can look at a portfolio of curated examples that showcase the range of student competencies over a rich body of work.

**Table 2: What Information Do Performance Assessment Artifacts Reveal?**

Artifact	What does this artifact look like?	What does this artifact reveal?
<b>The student-facing task (what students were asked to complete)</b>	Prompts, questions, scenarios, and directions students received to complete the task	What was asked of students
<b>Samples of student work</b>	Individual student work or samples of the range of student work elicited in response to the task	Students' knowledge, skills, and abilities through a constructed response to the posed task
<b>Student reflections</b>	Annotations of their work or written or oral (video) reflections on the experience	Metacognitive processing of learning; contextual features that were critical; and further insights into the knowledge, skills, and abilities demonstrated
<b>Teacher or external evaluator reflections on student work</b>	Filled-out rubrics; provided feedback; written or oral reflection on specific tasks; and/or a collection of student work that represents a cumulative demonstration of students' knowledge, skills, and abilities.	Professional, external evaluation of student performance to provide expert validation
<b>School profiles</b>	Descriptive information about the school provided by the school and/or school system	Important information about the school and community context; grading and testing information; student outcomes; curriculum and special features of the learning experience; how the school system attends to equity.

### Activities That Support Step 2:

- 1. Determine what features of student performance are most important to elicit.** Consider what competencies a performance assessment submission should highlight and which features are less important for the stated goals (e.g., that information that is otherwise available through a different source within the application materials). [Defining Performance Assessments on p. 6](#) describes some of the features admission staff may seek to emphasize. Note that it is unlikely that any single set of artifacts would include all of these features; this should be treated as a menu to prompt thinking about the most important features.
- 2. Decide which artifacts are most likely to convey the needed information.** Based on the features of student performance that are most important to surface, consider which components of student performance (e.g., student work, task, evaluation rubric) will be most helpful. See Table 2 and Appendix A for support.
- 3. Consider the admission context**, including the following:
  - Who will be reviewing these artifacts?
  - How much time, capacity, and expertise will reviewers have to devote to this process?
  - How will artifacts be evaluated?
  - What professional learning or training will be provided to reviewers?
  - How will artifact review be incorporated into admission decision processes?

## Step 3: Craft and Refine Your Ask

When it is clear what information should be surfaced and what artifacts will help support an equitable admission process, it is time to determine what exactly to ask students to submit. Application requests for performance assessments should be clear about expectations and intended use, present little additional burden to students, and be piloted to ensure they support the intended outcomes. By the end of this step, admission officers should be able to answer this framing question: **What language should we use to request performance assessment artifacts as part of student applications?**

### Activities That Support Step 3:

**1. Draft and refine an ask that connects your “why,” priority features, and targeted artifacts.** When crafting the ask, admission officers should be as clear as possible about what artifacts are expected and why they are being requested. Clear requests for performance assessments often include:

- why the performance assessments are being requested;
- what specific artifact(s) should be submitted;
- what aspects of student performance should be highlighted; and
- who should be submitting these materials and by when.

See Appendix B for an annotated example of a request for performance assessment materials.

**2. Establish a “no-harm” pilot program.** Before changing admission policies systemically, it is important to determine whether the performance assessment information requested will lead to the changes envisioned. Performance assessment information should be piloted as part of admission processes through a no-harm approach in which performance assessment information is only used to remove barriers to admission. Put another way, during the piloting phase, performance assessments should not be used to deny admission to a student who would have otherwise been admitted. During this pilot, consider collecting both information about the immediate application process (e.g., reviewer experiences, student experiences, and how considering performance assessment information leads to different admission decisions than applications without performance assessment information) and longitudinal information about how students admitted based on their performance assessments fare at the institution (e.g., retention, pass rates).

**3. Refine your ask based on your experiences.** Using the pilot experiences, consider how soliciting performance assessments could be more useful to meet the stated goals. Some questions to consider include the following:

- Who were the students who submitted performance assessment information?
- What was more helpful in student submissions and why? What was less helpful?
- Was there anything you learned about students that was surprising?

- What about the submissions (e.g., student reflections, evaluated rubrics) was the most critical determinant of whether the performance assessment provided uniquely useful information?
- What aspects of the student experience (e.g., platform interface) were positive? What could be improved?
- In what ways were reviewers well prepared to evaluate performance assessment information? What changes need to be made to the reviewer professional learning processes?
- In what ways was performance assessment information used to create a compelling case to admit more diverse students? Were there any instances in which the performance assessment information created unintended barriers to admission? How can the no-harm policy be strengthened?

## Step 4: Conduct Outreach and Communicate Your Request

Once you know what you want students to submit, communicate that to guidance and college counselors, students, and families, including where these artifacts should come from, how students should contextualize them, and how the information will be used. For performance assessments to be used in service of more holistic and equitable admission processes, it is important that all students and the adults supporting them know about this opportunity. At the end of this step, admission officers should be able to answer this framing question: **What is our strategy for communicating this opportunity so that we are surfacing this information from the students this is designed to serve?**

### Activities That Support Step 4:

- 1. Ensure your performance assessment request is clearly included in all appropriate admission avenues.** This might include institution admission websites, specific program webpages, application materials, FAQs, etc.
- 2. Provide support for k–12 guidance counselors and school system leaders** to understand how these requests are contributing to admission decisions and how activities within k–12 spaces can provide students with the opportunities to engage in performance assessments. This might include helping schools and school systems consider what features of student performance are valuable, providing examples of the kinds of performance assessments and student work that is most supportive of college admission, and investing in platforms that seamlessly interface with popular k–12 systems for documenting performance assessments over time (e.g., College Coalition Student Locker, Mastery Transcript, Portfolium).
- 3. Engage partners** (e.g., k–12 schools and systems, organizations committed to college access and success) to encourage students and schools to engage with this opportunity. This might include both partners who will be effective communication ambassadors and those who may provide schools and districts with direct support (e.g., developing effective school profiles, implementing performance assessment systems, etc.).

## A Growing Movement: K–12 School Systems That Use Performance Assessments

Several public school districts and networks are using performance assessments to as a routine part of their student evaluation processes in high school. Examples of these systems can be found across the country and include:

- [New York Performance Standards Consortium](#)
- [New Tech Network](#)
- [The Internationals Network for Public Schools](#)
- [The Asia Society Network](#)
- [The Boston Public Pilot Schools](#)
- [Envision Schools](#)
- [Linked Learning Alliance schools](#)
- [High Tech High \(CA\)](#)
- [Oakland Public Schools \(CA\)](#)
- [Pasadena Unified School District \(CA\)](#)
- [Performance Assessment of Competency Education \(PACE\) districts \(NH\)](#)

These systems, among others, may present useful partnership opportunities for higher education institutions seeking to incorporate performance assessments as part of their admission processes. For example, the City University of New York (CUNY) is partnering with the New York Performance Standards Consortium to pilot the use of the Consortium’s rigorous Performance Based Assessment Tasks as part of admission decisions for students who do not meet standardized test score thresholds. Initial findings from this pilot are promising, demonstrating how performance assessments can reveal student readiness for college that may be obscured through other metrics. For more information about this pilot, please see [Assessing College Readiness Through Authentic Student Work](#). For additional information about school systems that use performance assessment, please see [The Promise of Performance Assessments](#).

## Performance Assessments in Higher Education Admission:

### A Hypothetical Example

Admission officer Swati is looking for additional information about students to help make more informed decisions for admission. She recognizes that many highly qualified students who would likely thrive at ABC College are being weeded out during the admission process and wants to look for features in applications that serve as more holistic measures of student readiness. This example describes Swati and her team's thinking as they work through the process described in this tool.

- Swati and her team consider the questions outlined in Step 1 of the process and decide that what they are most interested in is:
  - more about competencies of individual students (developed inside or outside the classroom); and
  - information about students' 21st-century skills, as those are not clearly or reliably conveyed through student grades, test scores, an extracurricular activities list, or admission essays.
- As the team members discuss this further, they realize they are looking for information about some specific skills and dispositions, such as collaboration, communication, and creativity, but they are not looking to make “judgments,” per se, but just to better understand how applicants currently demonstrate and leverage these skills. They want to use this information primarily to make admission decisions but recognize that this could help students' future advisors as well.
- Based on what Swati and her team discussed about why they want additional information, Swati examines the features of performance assessment described in [Features of High-Quality Performance Assessments on p. 9](#) and decides that she really wants to prioritize:
  - examples of students engaging with authentic, real-world challenges;
  - artifacts that give students the chance to show a high degree of collaboration, creativity, and agency in their work; and
  - a window into student thinking—why students thought the experience was compelling and why they think it is a good example of how they deal with problems in novel and unique ways.
- Reviewing the range of task-related artifacts (see Table 2) they could ask for, along with the features they prioritized from Appendix A, Swati and her team decide that they want to see:
  - a **task** students were asked to complete that addressed a real-world problem;
  - **students' work** in response to the task that shows a high degree of collaboration, creativity, and student choice in determining what they did and how they did it; and
  - A **student reflection** on the experience, through either a video (oral) or written submission.
- As Swati is pulling together this plan, she realizes that her team is unlikely to have the time or expertise to actually do the evaluation of students' submissions, but she still feels this is an important piece of the puzzle that will be essential to a better admission process.



- She decides they also need to request some kind of external validation of the experience and student work, and so she adds to the submission request:
  - **a teacher’s or other external evaluator’s reflection** on the experience and how the student’s work reflects the attributes Swati and her team are targeting; and/or
  - **a school profile** that highlights how opportunities for the development and demonstration of 21st-century skills were integrated into teaching, learning, and assessment.
- As Swati and her team continue to consider how they will process this new information, one of her team members raises the issue that not all students are part of school systems that regularly incorporate 21st-century skills into their approaches or have regular opportunities to engage in meaningful real-world challenges collaboratively and creatively. Is this new information going to further disadvantage learners who are perpetually underserved?
- Swati’s team carefully considers how to balance this trade-off: The information is important, but the team also wants to make sure that its admission decisions reflect *potential to succeed*, not just a mirror of past opportunities or lack thereof. The team decides on the following decision rules:
  - Performance assessment submissions will be a way to celebrate and contextualize students’ creativity and ingenuity, not to penalize students with more limited opportunities. This asset-based lens helps Swati’s team develop an internal rubric for considering performance assessment submissions that elevate the reflections and take into consideration the quality of the tasks themselves.
  - When Swati’s team is confident that the school or system incorporates 21st-century skills into its routine teaching, learning, and assessment approaches (based on existing relationships and school profiles) it will use this information to contextualize transcript information further, particularly for learners whose test scores might be incongruous with their 21st-century skills and dispositions.
  - For all learners who submit performance assessment artifacts, Swati’s team will pay particular attention to features of those artifacts for students whose traditional assessment information is weak (reflected through standardized test scores and grades/GPA unless otherwise noted in the school profile).
  - Swati’s team members also reflect that this conversation made them think about whether they should more deeply consider performance assessments as an avenue to surface student attributes. In doing so, they realize that this process would also be easier if they were to develop relationships with schools and systems that incorporate performance assessments into their teaching and learning systems—they could then spend less human capacity on evaluating the materials (knowing that the assessments were produced in robust systems) and more time on what the materials are revealing about the students.
  - This reflection leads Swati to refine what they are asking for from individual students and also to more intentionally pursue asking schools to submit information about this aspect of their systems, and forming relationships with schools and systems that routinely incorporate performance assessments.

## Recommendations

**Start small and be specific.** When first considering using performance assessments as part of an application process, admission officers should start with a specific use in mind. This could be something like looking at performance assessments for a particular group of students (e.g., those with lower SAT/ACT scores, those applying for a specific pathway or program), optional performance assessments to supplement a particular component of student transcripts, etc.

**Leverage current “look-fors.”** Think about current admission processes—are there particular schools, teachers, or counselors that are trusted to recommend students who will be successful at a given institution? Are there some specific demonstrations that institution faculty say is an indicator of student success within their classes? Consider whether a performance assessment might surface those competencies in a wider range of students, providing admission teams with a larger pool of students who are likely to be successful at the institution through a more equitable process.

**Be as clear as possible.** Because artifacts come in many different forms, being explicit about what a submission should include will help ensure you receive the kind of information you will find most useful. Be clear with students and schools about how performance assessment information will be interpreted—if particular knowledge, skills, and abilities are being targeted, admission officers should consider telling students how this specific institution is defining those features.

**Request reflections.** One of the benefits of performance assessment is that there is an implied aspect of evaluation—some expert or group of experts (possibly including students themselves) has evaluated student performance on this task or experience before. Requesting student and external reflections as part of applications that include performance assessments can make evaluating applications much less time intensive while revealing more information about students.

**Choose a platform that is easy to use for both students and application readers.** Requesting performance assessment information may be an extra step for students and counselors during the application process; at the same time, application readers may not be prepared to incorporate performance assessments into their decision processes. Using a well-designed and intentional platform can ease burdens on both sides of the application process (e.g., [Coalition for College’s Locker](#) for supporting student curation of a selection of performance assessments throughout high school or for submitting and reviewing artifacts, such as through [Common App](#) and [SlideRoom](#))

**Consider starting with schools that use performance assessments as an integral part of their systems.** Performance assessments that are developed and used as part of a teaching and learning system will likely have rigorous development and implementation processes associated with them and might lead to artifacts (task, student work, rubrics) that are easier to navigate. Partnering with school systems that are already doing this work (such as those described in [A Growing Movement: K–12 School Systems That Use Performance Assessments on p. 15](#) and in [The Promise of Performance Assessments](#)) might help inform how performance assessments can be particularly useful for admission needs by taking some of the noise out of the submissions received.

## Appendix A: Connecting Performance Assessments to Admission Needs

If I want to know more about ...	I should look for curated examples of ...
<b>A student's 21st-century skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• student-facing tasks (or portfolio of tasks) that are highly connected to (1) authentic real-world challenges that (2) require a high degree of collaboration, creativity, transfer, and/or student agency;</li> <li>• accompanying student work;</li> <li>• student reflections that specifically address their thinking processes and approaches; and</li> <li>• teacher or external evaluator reflections that specifically address these targets and features (rubrics if available for these specific targets).</li> </ul>
<b>Student mastery of specific disciplinary areas in k–12</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• student-facing tasks as an example in a targeted subject or content area (verifying or deepening grades and scores) or a set of tasks across content within the domain (independently assessing mastery) that require a high degree of disciplinary sophistication, agency, and transfer (including across disciplines);</li> <li>• accompanying student work that showcases students' "best thinking" or "biggest aha!" moments in their disciplinary courses and offerings; and</li> <li>• rubrics filled out by teachers or external evaluators (across the portfolio if independently assessing mastery) that positions the student work relative to expectations for the competencies targeted.</li> <li>• Note that in some admission and placement decisions, you might be interested in individual student approaches and thinking to a very specific kind of problem or challenge. In these cases, it can be helpful to design your own performance task and evaluation criteria because students' opportunities to learn will vary considerably, and they may not have a particular kind of experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Student passions, interests, and motivations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• student-facing tasks and accompanying work samples that (1) provide a high degree of student choice OR tasks that students identify as having high relevance to them and (2) encourage students to connect to their communities, home lives, interests, and identities; and</li> <li>• student reflections that discuss student interests, identities, and passions and how this connected to performance on the task.</li> </ul>
<b>The quality of a student's k–12 learning experiences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a school profile that includes information about structures and routines (including information related to assessments and grading) at the school or course level that emphasize collaboration, attention to mastery of key expectations and competencies, and equitable opportunities and outcomes;</li> <li>• examples of representative student-facing tasks and accompanying student work that require a high degree of disciplinary sophistication and agency and that include a selection of features (as described in <a href="#">Features of High-Quality Performance Assessments on p. 9</a>);</li> <li>• student reflections that highlight their thinking about the tasks and how that connects to the student's understanding and experiences; and</li> <li>• teacher or external evaluator rubrics.</li> </ul>

## Appendix B: Annotated Example of Materials Request Language

### Creative portfolios

While we neither expect nor require additional material beyond the application, we know that many students are involved in many cool activities outside of class, and we love to hear about them!

Researchers, performing artists, visual artists, and makers may send in portfolios for review by MIT staff or faculty through [SlideRoom](https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login) (<https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login>). For more information on each type of portfolio, please review the descriptions below.

Portfolios must be submitted by November 1 for Early Action or January 1 for Regular Action.

The ask is clear about **how the materials will be used and how they should be submitted**: it is optional, should be submitted through SlideRoom, and there are clear submission deadlines. Each type of submission is clearly articulated below, so students know what to submit.

### Research

Students who have worked on a significant research project outside of high school classes are welcome to submit a research supplement via [SlideRoom](https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login) (<https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login>). If you have worked on more than one research project, we recommend focusing on the project that is most important to you.

Please answer a brief questionnaire about your research and provide a letter of recommendation from your research mentor. Researchers may include a PDF of their abstract, poster, or research paper if available.

Here, the ask clearly tells students **what to submit**: a single research project that is important to the student. It **provides examples of the kinds of materials (abstract, poster, paper) that can be submitted**, and **requires both a reflection in the form of a questionnaire as well as a reflection from a research mentor**.

### Music & theater arts

Performing artists (musicians, composers, dancers, designers, directors, writers, and actors) with exceptional talent are welcome to submit a supplement via [SlideRoom](https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login) (<https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login>). We recommend submitting work that represents a range of styles or skills if available.

- Musicians: Submit two recordings representing contrasting styles or periods, of about 10 minutes total duration. Each selection must be an unedited solo performance. If possible, include accompaniment where appropriate.
- Composers: Submit one recent composition score in PDF format.
- Actors, dancers, directors, and designers: Submit up to three videos or images. Please keep the total video time no longer than 10 minutes.
- Writers: You may submit all or part of one or two scripts. Submissions should be no longer than 10 pages total. If your work was performed and recorded, you may submit up to 10 minutes of video.

### Visual art & architecture

Creative individuals with exceptional talent are welcome to submit a portfolio via [SlideRoom](https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login) (<https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login>).

We encourage all types of media art, including design, drawing, painting, mixed media, digital media, photography, sculpture, and architectural work. You may submit a portfolio of up to 10 images of your work for review. Include the title, medium, a brief description, date completed, and a brief description of each work's concept or inspiration.

### Makers

The Maker Portfolio is an opportunity for students to showcase their projects that require creative insight, technical skill, and a hands-on approach to learning by doing. Members of the MIT Engineering Advisory Board review all Maker portfolios. If you would like your technically creative work to be reviewed by academic and instructional staff, then it might be a good fit for the Maker Portfolio.

For your Maker Portfolio, you may submit images, video totaling no more than 120 seconds, and up to one PDF of technical documentation and/or specifications via [SlideRoom](https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login) (<https://mitadmissions.slideroom.com/#/Login>). You may document one project or many, and your work may have been done inside, or outside, of school, and alone or with a team; just make sure you explain it to us!

This language tells students that **what they are looking for** is "creative insight, technical skills, and hands-on approach to learning by doing." It also tells students **who will be reviewing the information, helping them understand what to submit**.

Like the other instructions, the **ask is very clear about who, what, and how**. It also **emphasizes the importance of explanation**.

## About Reimagining College Access

Reimagining College Access is an initiative led by the Learning Policy Institute in collaboration with EducationCounsel. It brings together a diverse group of k–12 and higher education policy and practice leaders engaged in using authentic assessments of students' competencies and mastery of skills needed for college, work, and life in the 21st century. Visit <http://learningpolicyinstitute.org/rca> to learn more about the initiative and its work.



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The Learning Policy Institute conducts and communicates independent, high-quality research to improve education policy and practice. Working with policymakers, researchers, educators, community groups, and others, the Institute seeks to advance evidence-based policies that support empowering and equitable learning for each and every child. Nonprofit and nonpartisan, the Institute connects policymakers and stakeholders at the local, state, and federal levels with the evidence, ideas, and actions needed to strengthen the education system from preschool through college and career readiness.