

# Use Assessment to Increase Student Use of a Biblical Perspective of Course Content

Imagine.

Every student in every class in every unit—proficiently using 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?
- How would current parents respond?
- How would parents considering sending their children to your school respond?
- How would staff at your school 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 in every unit—proficiently using a biblical perspective.

## What's the Framework?

Here's a 4-part framework for helping students increase their understanding and use of a biblical perspective of course content. This article addresses parts 3 and 4.

1. At Christian schools, students increase their understanding and use of a biblical perspective.
2. Students increase their understanding and use of a biblical perspective in all subjects by responding to questions regarding course content.
3. Students increase their understanding and use 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.

## Use Assessment to Make This Vision a Reality

Students increase their use of a biblical perspective as they complete rigorous assessments that require them to connect course content, their lives, and a biblical perspective. If your students completed an assessment in each unit like those listed below, how would that affect their proficiency?

Science 2: Write a 1–2 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 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 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 the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*).

## Use Assessment to Address Student Learning Needs

Using assessment positively affects student learning, in part because using assessment addresses the following five student learning needs regarding using of a biblical perspective:

**(1) “This doesn't seem important.** My teachers don't grade me on this. Do teachers really think this is important?”

Use assessment to help your students see that understanding and using a biblical perspective is important. By giving assessments, you can determine student learning levels and talk to those who need to improve. You can also give a grade, thereby showing you value this.

**(2) “I don't know what it looks like.** I know what telling others about Jesus looks like—we read missionary biographies at school and I go on mission trips with my church. What does doing a good job on using a biblical perspective look like in an essay? And what does this look like in the computer world?”

Sound teaching practice includes showing your student samples of student work before assigning an assessment, including an assessment requiring students to demonstrate an understanding and/or use of a biblical perspective of course content. When your students see samples, they get a better idea of what using a biblical perspective looks like. This, in turn, helps them increase proficiency.

**(3) “I need time to think about what I'm learning.** We don't really do this in class, and I've got sports after school and homework at night. When am I supposed to find time to reflect? Could we do some journaling during class?”

Use in-class assessments to provide students with time to reflect on what they are learning. For example, have your students journal about how they can use math to serve others. Or have your students do a case study involving how to respond to a pollution problem in the community.

**(4) “To really get this, I need to connect the Bible with my life, not just with what I study in class.** If my teachers would give me chances to connect the Bible with my life—my music, my relationships, my problems—I think I could get it. One of my homeschooler friends got to analyze a CD from a biblical perspective. That sounds pretty cool.”

Design and give assessments that require students to connect course content, their lives, and a biblical perspective. For example: “Write a 500-word critique of a favorite song from a biblical perspective. Explain the author's meaning, the literary and poetic techniques the author uses to communicate the meaning, evaluate that meaning from a biblical perspective, and weave in your response to the lyrics.”

**(5) “I need more chances to practice.** It's hard for me to get good at using a biblical perspective when I don't get enough practice. Using a biblical perspective takes skill. I get repeated skill practice in math, and I'm good at it. Can I get more skill practice?”

Use assessment to give your students practice—debate, discussion, presentations, projects, essays, journals, document-based questions, and tests. Remember, learning involves repeated practice: How many math problems does a student need to successfully complete to learn math? How many presentations does a student need to do to feel comfortable and skillful? How many times does a choir need to rehearse a song in preparation for a concert? How many keystrokes does a student need to make to master keyboarding? So, how many times does a student need to practice using a biblical perspective in a given subject so that she can use it proficiently? (See sidebar “Do It Automatically.”)

## Use Effective Assessments to Help Students Increase Proficiency

Using assessments will help your students increase their use of a biblical perspective, particularly if the assessments are 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 an A3-size poster that shows what you learned, including your calculations for greenhouse

gas emissions, a graph of your personal footprint, and 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 of money—not if they are committed honoring Jesus by implementing it. 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 a student takes a 12-minute run fitness test, the score is not affected by the degree the student is committed to running. If a student takes a reading test, the score is not affected by the degree to which the student is committed 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 valued-added content, which includes new content and/or connections between course content and a biblical perspective. For example, teach students the just war theory and ask them to apply it to 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. (See sidebar “Being Christian Does Not Equal Being Proficient.”)

## Being Christian Does Not Equal Being Proficient

You are 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 them 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. You are puzzled, particularly since both assignments required a similar skill set. You wonder, “Why didn’t they get it?”

You reflect you what you did. “I used direct instruction to teach romanticism and realism, 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 of 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 to students for the second assessment. Please remember that being a Christian who behaves well does not mean that a student proficiently understands and can use a biblical perspective of course content.

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**(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.

## Check Your Understanding of These Four Characteristics

Identify which of the four characteristics of an effective biblical perspective assessment (see above) each of the following assessments has (answers are at the end of the article):

**(1) Social Studies 5:** Choose one of the following (test) essay questions.

- You are an advisor to Queen Elizabeth I. What advice would you give her about gaining land and wealth? What should she do to settle the disagreements with Spain?
- You are a member of the colony at Jamestown. You have no food and the others want to seize the crops of the Native Americans. What should you do?
- You are one of the writers of the Mayflower Compact. Everything needs to be for the good of others. What types of laws or agreements would you create? What would you expect from the people? What would you do to help the colony?

**(2) Social Studies 6:** Design a scrapbook about your field trip to London. Your scrapbook should include (1) photos and materials (pamphlets, tickets, programs) for each place we visited, (2) an explanation of the historical and cultural value of each place, and (3) four or more reflections of how God showed His faithfulness to us during the trip.

**(3) English 8:** Using a book that you’ve already read for independent reading this year, prepare a 2- to 3-minute presentation in which you give an exciting introduction to the plot, a brief explanation of the conflict and theme, a biblical perspective of the conflict and theme (including how the book shows “taking a stand”), and a satisfying conclusion.

**(4) Middle School ESL:** Give a 3- to 5-minute presentation about one of your caretaking actions, which could include reading to elementary students. In your presentation, explain what you did and how this is an example of serving God and others and/or caring for God’s creation, how our actions affected others, and any comments about how you could do this better or more often.

**(5) Math 8:** Mr. Hall wants to buy an Apple computer and does not have enough money to pay up front. As Mr. Hall’s financial adviser, use a spreadsheet analysis to explain a credit card payment plan, the Apple credit account plan, and the Apple education lease plan. Next, advise Mr. Hall on which payment plan he should choose, basing your recommendation on a biblical perspective of wealth and material goods we studied in class. Give at least one Bible reference.

**(6) Math (Functions, Statistics, and Trigonometry):** Write an analysis of a set of data from a book of lists or other almanac. (The set must contain at least 20 data.) The analysis should include:

- One chart which shows the data and a scatter plot of the data.
- An explanation of the data and its source.
- Three separate graphs of the data with each regression and equation on the graph. These graphs should be labeled appropriately.
- Three graphs of the residuals with appropriate labels.
- Three explanations about the fit of the regression to the data.
- A concluding paragraph about the best fitting regression and the use of the model for prediction.

**(7) English 10:** How would Okonkwo (*Things Fall Apart*) answer each of the following questions?: What is the significance of words? Who am I? Who is my neighbor? What is wrong with the world? Give concrete evidence from the book to support each answer.

Now it's your turn. Before reading further, use the 4 characteristics to develop your own biblical perspective assessment.

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

1. Invite a colleague to use the 4 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. Student engagement increases when students make choices. 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 to collaboratively revise the assessment with a colleague, and then give it to your students. Taking the assessment gives you first-hand experience with the prompt—with the clarity, precision, and feasibility of the prompt.
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 (or when appropriate), 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 assessments has helped our students better understand and use a biblical perspective of course content. Would using assessments help your students? If so, what step will you take this week toward using biblical perspective assessments?

Here are 4 options:

1. Talk for 15 minutes with a colleague about this article
2. Use the 4 characteristics to develop one assessment
3. Ask a colleague to help you revise one assessment
4. 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?

### Answers to "Check Your Understanding"

1. Social Studies 5: 2-4
2. Social Studies 8: 2-4
3. English 8: 1-4
4. MS ESL: 1-4
5. Math 8: 1-4
6. Math (FST): 2-4
7. English 10: 2-4

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## **Do It Automatically**

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 student need before she can do the above?

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

1. How much practice do your students need to “automatically” use a biblical perspective of course content in a given subject?
2. How much practice do your students currently receive?
3. What will you do to close the gap between how much practice students need and how much practice students get?

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