

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Ferguson JS. **Using authentic assessment in information literacy programs: Tools, techniques, and strategies.** 1st ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield; 2018. Paperback: 170 p. ISBN: 978-1-5381-0481-1. Price: USD \$45.00. Available from: <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538104828/Using-Authentic-Assessment-in-Information-Literacy-Programs-Tools-Techniques-and-Strategies>.

Academic librarians are under increasing pressure to empirically demonstrate the library's impact and commitment to student success by validating evidence of student learning and effective teaching in information literacy. Compounding the often limited amount of time allocated to information literacy, with the diversity in teaching and learning styles, truly "authentic" assessment could be especially challenging to achieve.

Under the well-established construct of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards in 2000 [1] and more recently the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in 2016 [2], several studies and books have reviewed, compared and made recommendations on the frequently used assessment methods [3-7], *without* explicitly exploring the concept or implications of authentic assessment. In a 2018 review article, Erlinger observed that there is "an overall shift in the type of assessments from lower-level surveys and questionnaires toward more authentic assessment" [8]. *Using Authentic Assessment in Information Literacy Programs: Tools, Techniques, and Strategies* is the first monograph that helps clarify what is meant by authentic assessment in the context of information literacy instruction, differentiates authentic assessment from more common modes of assessment, highlights exemplary case studies of how authentic assessment is being used, and offers step-by-step guidelines for implementation.

Author Jennifer S. Ferguson is the Team Lead for Arts and Humanities at Tufts University's Tisch

Library. She has a BA from UCLA, a MA from Rutgers University, and a MSLIS from Simmons College. Having collaborated with faculty and other librarians to design, implement, teach, and assess student success for undergraduate and graduate information literacy programs across different instructional settings, Ferguson is currently serving on the Tufts University Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee as the 2019-2020 Co-chair [9] to support strategic pedagogy and assessment initiatives. She has developed library instruction modules that address the ACRL's Framework and has been invited to speak at national and international conferences on authentic assessment.

What exactly is authentic assessment? According to Ferguson, to be considered authentic an assessment requires students to *analyze* information, *synthesize* knowledge, and *apply* what they have learned to perform relevant tasks. These tasks should be related to the subject matter that the students are studying and should ideally involve solving real-world information problems. By connecting information literacy directly with students' coursework, authentic assessment would not only activate students' intrinsic interest and facilitate knowledge transfer but would also empower students to think more critically about their own learning. Ferguson further emphasizes that, "[t]he key to an authentic assessment is to assign a relevant learning task, provide clear performance expectations [...], provide an opportunity for reflection, and offer meaningful feedback in order to foster deep learning." Beyond just a measure for student learning, authentic assessment is also an instrument to improve information literacy instructional design and to demonstrate the library's value to the academic mission.

Overall, the book follows a logical flow in its organizational structure, is well researched, and curates illustrative case studies from the recent literature, including examples tailored for public health, pharmacy, nursing, and health sciences information literacy programs. These examples, however, are not indexed nor indicated in the table of contents so they

could be difficult to locate. With the reality of one-shot information literacy sessions being the prevalent mode of instruction, Ferguson makes every effort to showcase exemplary one-shot authentic assessment techniques, highlights their strengths in terms of student learning, originality, and implementation, and suggests alternative methods throughout the book.

In chapter 1, Ferguson examines the theoretical basis of authentic assessment within the larger educational context, while acknowledging some of the common challenges that make authentic assessment difficult to implement for academic librarians. From lack of training and recognition from the faculty, to practicality and self-doubt, the biggest barrier by far is time.

By exploring the current state of authentic assessment in the most common information literacy instructional settings, chapter 2 distinguishes between formative assessment and summative assessment, and situates authentic assessment in academic libraries. Its concise summary and tables, outlining some of the most frequently used authentic assessment methods and the instructional settings in which they are implemented, help lay the foundation for the rest of the book.

Chapter 3 groups the authentic assessment techniques covered in this book into formative assessment and summative assessment, and delves into the advantages and limitations of each of those techniques in order to aid academic librarians in selecting the suitable ones. What is most valuable, and where Ferguson's experience shines, are the author's insights into the potential pitfalls of some of the assessment tools. For example, owing to the separation of time between information literacy instruction and when an annotated bibliography is due at the end of a semester, sorting out the librarian's contribution on a student's final work could be tricky.

The sections of the book that readers will find most practical are chapters 4 to 6, where Ferguson takes us through some of the strongest cases of authentic assessment in practice, contextualizes assessment in terms of instructional design, then provides step-by-step procedures and sample assignments or worksheets for implementation. Each chapter is logically scaffolded and built on the previous ones, just like some of the best assessment strategies recommended by the author. Along the way, Ferguson also suggests possible ways to improve some of the selected studies. The summary

tables in chapter 4 and checklist-like figures in chapter 5 help underscore the key characteristics and strengths of the selected cases, while the sample assessment tools in chapter 6 are illustrative and adaptable for other settings. These supplementary materials are designed to support instructional librarians with teaching, learning and assessment.

Out of the 141 references cited in this book, the majority (111, 79%) Ferguson selects and reviews were published between 2010 and 2017. With the ACRL Framework having officially been adopted only since 2016 [2], this body of references might not be explicitly compliant to the Framework. However, in the final chapter, Ferguson recognizes the framework's concept-driven flexibility and potential, and connects authentic assessment to the framework, albeit only at a high-level by suggesting possible ways to implement for each frame. As information literacy instruction's focus is shifting away from standardized competencies, further research is warranted to discover how exactly authentic assessment as outlined by Ferguson is being utilized under the ACRL Framework.

Requiring students to "analyze, synthesize, and apply" what they have learned is Ferguson's central thesis regarding authentic assessment. Noted by the author, this premise stems from a blogpost written by Professor of Psychology, Jon Mueller at North Central College [10]. While Ferguson makes a convincing case, and I completely agree with the proposition, I also find the author belabours the point at times, making reading the book cover-to-cover feel repetitive. A better way to use the book is to select the sections pertaining to your instructional settings or assessment methods of interest, which are clearly laid out throughout the book.

Demands for accountability and curricular outcomes from legislative bodies and accrediting stakeholders are driving assessment in post-secondary institutions. It is especially true for learners and educators in medicine in North America with the implementation of competency-based medical education (CBME) [11,12]. At its core, CBME focuses on outcomes, emphasizes learner abilities, and promotes self-directed learning [13]. *Using Authentic Assessment in Information Literacy Programs* aligns with CBME's mission and is an indispensable resource for academic librarians in health sciences.

Statement of Competing Interests

No competing interests declared.

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