

## The power to choose: Engaging students and assessing proficiency

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### Abstract

How can teachers create opportunities for student choice while using the Integrated Performance Assessment framework? Differentiation of assessment allows students to have greater agency over their learning and bolster their proficiency journey. Additionally, by utilizing a framework for student engagement in a personalized learning model, participants will investigate how building classroom relationships and creating choices within assessments yield opportunities for meaningful learning experiences. Differentiation enables students to select topics for assessment by choosing a variety of tasks to demonstrate proficiency. Teachers can meet the diverse needs, abilities, cultural backgrounds, and proficiency goals of students through differentiated choice opportunities. Using this model, teachers become the guide on the side as students become agents of demonstrating their proficiency through a variety of meaningful, communicative tasks.

*Keywords: assessment & feedback, technology integration, student experiences*

Over the past few years, educators have worked tirelessly to shift their teaching and learning practices to meet the demands of in-person, remote, and hybrid learning models. As world language educators, we see the benefits of using a variety of platforms and applications for in-person and remote learning to create authentic learning experiences during these unique educational times. Building on the momentum of adapting strategies to meet learners where they are, we suggest continuing the practices of pandemic times that allow students to develop linguistic and cultural competency. Teachers who create space for personalized learning build student agency and allow students to advance on the proficiency continuum.

One approach to this personalized learning is what we call the Modified Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) Choice Board approach: a teaching tool that hooks students into the thematic context of a unit of study through interpretive, interpersonal, presentational, and investigative tasks (Figure 1).

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Figure 1  
Sample Modified IPA Choice Board

<b>Sample Choice Board: Novice Low-Novice Mid</b>				
<b>Interpretive Task</b>	<b>Interpersonal Task</b>	<b>Presentational Task</b>	<b>Investigative Task</b>	<b>Interactive Task</b>
Interpretive Reading: Menu and pick what you would order Go Formative	Interpersonal Speaking Preferences FlipGrid	Presentational Speaking In person: Inquiry presentation on food Google Slides/FlipGrid/Screencastify	Investigative Task Identify favorite dishes in an area/region and report	Interactive Scenario: Interview a chef and report what you have learned
Interpretive Listening Preferences Go Formative	Interpersonal Speaking/ Writing Debating what to order in person Google Classroom Question	Presentational Writing Write an opinion piece about preferences Word Doc/Google Doc	Investigative Task: Identify foods that might be consumed at different times of day	Interactive Scenario:
Interpretive Watching Cooking Show on Youtube Go Formative	Interpersonal Speaking Ordering in person scenario In person	Presentational Speaking Inquiry presentation on eating FlipGrid	Investigative Task: Look up ingredients specific to a region	Interactive Scenario
Interpretive Reading Review Go Formative	Interpersonal Writing: Chatting with a friend about their food likes and dislikes Google Classroom Question	Presentational Writing: Students create a Google site to review food Google Site	Investigative Task: Look up places to eat in a city by reading reviews in the target language	Interactive Scenario

Utilizing the framework presented by Doubet and Carbaugh (2020), the Modified IPA Choice Board strives to “hook” students into the learning context, allows for exploration of new content, sharpens modal skills, creates space for formative assessment by the teacher, and allows students to interact and process ideas together. This approach allows for students to execute these ideas in both face-to-face and asynchronous learning. Continuing to use the tools we have gained over the course of the pandemic to leverage our work we are creating an approach where more students will enhance their skills in creative and renewed ways.

The Modified IPA Choice Board approach allows students to self-select language tasks that they feel most comfortable with during a particular unit of study. A core component that allows students to “level up” in this paradigm is the ongoing scaffolding of content and structure related to the thematic units of study. Each task compels a student to dive deeper into language usage with an increased demand in the complexity of the output within each proficiency level. These tasks ask students to interpret meaning and have a purpose beyond the simple use of linguistic competency (VanPatten, 2017). Accordingly, these tasks permit teachers to garner student interest from the start of the lesson while creating opportunity for individualized and creative expression. This approach challenges students to use the target language and culture while engaged in a thematic, authentic task to process ideas with their classmates in a multi-modal manner. As a result, students essentially create an e-portfolio where they choose how to demonstrate their proficiency over a unit of study.

At the beginning of the pandemic, especially with the push towards more asynchronous and independent work, homework choice boards became a popular option to keep students engaged and striving towards proficiency. These choice boards create different challenges and tasks for students and accommodate students with differing access to materials than others, as explored in “The Disparities in Remote Learning Under Coronavirus” (Herold, 2020). Students appreciate the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency through a wide variety of options, and their feedback was overwhelmingly supportive and positive. Students are also more likely than before to complete their work, and their effort seems to increase due to the choice of activities. Through choice, students feel a sense of ownership for their work that they may not have previously experienced (Kiser, 2020).

As we entered the first full school year of pandemic teaching, many teachers began to examine how to assess students in a way that would evaluate their proficiency. Rather than relying on traditional assessments, teachers had to look for innovative ways to assess students, especially with many students in hybrid situations with some in the classroom and others remote. Drawing from the previous success of homework choice boards, the authors decided to rethink traditional IPA. Using the traditional IPA as a model, we decided to combine the best practices of allowing opportunity for student choice and voice in communicative tasks that demonstrate the ACTFL (2012) Proficiency Guidelines, including interpretive tasks, interpersonal tasks, presentational tasks, investigative tasks, and interactive tasks as columns where students could choose which tasks they wanted to complete to demonstrate their proficiency. We reimagined the IPA as a choice board providing student choice of tasks. For these tasks, we included both low-tech and high-tech options to accommodate students who may not have access to or the ability to do higher tech activities, and provided a range of options to demonstrate proficiency, as explained in “10 Ways to Incorporate Student Choice in Your Classroom” (Spencer, 2016).

For interpretive tasks, we offered several ways to offer opportunities to demonstrate proficiency. Students could have a choice addressing a cultural theme through interpretive reading, interpretive listening, or interpretive viewing. Students performing the same proficiency task could demonstrate their proficiency in different ways. For example,

students could all watch a video in the target language about a topic. Then, students would demonstrate their interpretive skills through drawing or creating a series of cartoons captioned in the target language about the action of the video, writing what they learned in the video and what questions they might want to know in their primary language, writing a different ending to what happened in the video, creating an infographic based on the video, recreating the scene in the video, and so on.

A specific example incorporated choices based on a novella in a Latin 2 class (Novice High-Intermediate Low). Students read the novella, and then they demonstrated their interpretive skills and understanding of the text in several different ways. Some students created a Smashdoodle, an activity where students drew or created ten illustrations and picked out ten descriptive phrases in the target language that demonstrated the action of the text. Other students chose to draw or create six captioned comics in the target language. Some students chose to write fan fiction in their primary language, writing an alternate ending while drawing from examples within the text as an interpretive exercise that demonstrates their understanding of the text. The final option was for students to act out a scene in person or in a video that preceded the narrative of the novella, which could include people, puppets, or—as in one particularly memorable video—stop motion Lego™ figurines with target language voice overs and/or subtitles.

For interpersonal tasks, students have a choice of interpersonal speaking or interpersonal (extemporaneous) writing. These tasks are based around the same cultural theme, but the purpose is to demonstrate either the students' extemporaneous speaking (and listening) or writing (and reading) skills. The exchanges for interpersonal tasks are typically the same prompts that might be used in a normal year. However, with masks, social distancing, and students learning on video, interpersonal exchanges became difficult. The best option was to give students a choice about how their interpersonal skills could be assessed. Students in person would sometimes choose to do a traditional interpersonal exchange with another student in person, or they could record an exchange with another remote student over Zoom or Meet. As long as the students were speaking extemporaneously and could communicate effectively, this recorded approach was helpful in determining growth areas and proficiency. Surprisingly, many students who did not speak as much in class thrived with the option to do extemporaneous exchanges in the target language using discussion questions on Google Classroom or using the chat feature on Zoom or Google Meet. These exchanges closely resembled an exchange that students might have via email, text, or on an app such as WhatsApp, and students felt that this task demonstrated proficiency in an authentic way because so many people communicate through the medium of text.

For presentational tasks, students have the choice of live presentational speaking, recorded presentational speaking, or presentational writing. Many students who were not as comfortable speaking in front of their peers—particularly in a hybrid learning environment—enjoyed being able to use tech tools such as FlipGrid, Loom, or Screencastify to share their videos with the class. In class, students would perform a rough draft of their presentations for the teacher during station rotations, and when the rotations were completed, the class would watch their completed videos and live presentations. Students learning from home appreciated this flexibility of choice, and students who worked better from prepared videos rather than live performance were able to demonstrate proficiency without the added fear of stage fright.

Ultimately, as seen in “Differentiating by Offering Choices,” students have a better chance of demonstrating their learning effectively when they have choice about how they demonstrate their learning (Usher, 2019). Some of the benefits of this type of assessment

include students having ownership over their work and being more engaged when they pick how they are being assessed. However, we do realize that there can be potential drawbacks. For example, students could choose one type of communicative task to assess themselves rather than engaging with each communicative task. To prevent this, students are encouraged to pick one option from each column for each type of communicative task, so they would complete one interpretive, one interpersonal, and one presentational task. Additionally, students could be limited to which type of communicative task they could pick for each Modified IPA Choice Board. For example, if a student chose to create a cartoon for the interpretive task on their first IPA, they would then have to choose a different option for the next IPA.

Despite the challenges of assessment during the hybrid learning model these past few years, the Modified IPA Choice Boards proved to be a great option for students to demonstrate their proficiency on their own terms. Students use the products created in these Modified IPA Choice Boards as e-portfolios that demonstrate their proficiency in a variety of communicative tasks. In the article “EPortfolios: Using technology to enhance and assess student learning,” e-portfolios are shown as invaluable as tools for continuation in language because they can be shared with other instructors for valuable insight into each student’s personal learning experience (Wickersham-Fish & Chambers, 2006). As we reflect on our practice of the past few years, this different approach allows us to think about how, and in what ways, we assess our students with the end result of increasing proficiency and cultural competency.

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